A CASE STUDY OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES TO ADDRESS CYBERBULLYING AT A TECHNOLOGY-BASED MIDDLE SCHOOL

by

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A CASE STUDY OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES TO ADDRESS CYBERBULLYING AT A TECHNOLOGY-BASED MIDDLE SCHOOL

by

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DEDICATION

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord. “Plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

(Jeremiah 29:11 NKJV)

The pursuit of this doctoral degree has been a journey of great highs and lows. It was a journey in which I had to overcome all the highs and lows that life threw at me along the way. Through it all, God kept me and didn’t let me fall because He has a plan for my life. Therefore, I give Him all the honor and all the praise! God also blessed me with a great support system. To my husband, Avon, you are the real MVP! Thank you for supporting me through this uphill journey. I appreciate all the sacrifices you made to help me accomplish this goal. I sincerely thank you for driving me to Macon and Atlanta so I could use the travel time to prepare for my classes and my defenses. I also appreciate you for taking on extra responsibilities around the house and with the boys so I could complete the work necessary to earn this degree. Thank you for not letting me give up and giving me the extra push when the journey got hard. I love you and I sincerely appreciate all the sacrifices you make for our family.

I dedicate this work to my three wonderful sons, Tre, Trent, and Tristan. I love you and I appreciate the sacrifice you guys made while I completed this journey. I thank you for adjusting your interests and missing friends’ birthday parties and other activities to travel out of town, with me, for my classes. I also appreciate the foot massages, words
of encouragement, and meals. I hope this journey has taught you all the power of prayer, persistence, and perseverance and that God has a plan for all of us.

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ABSTRACT

BETTINA POLITE TATE
A CASE STUDY OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES TO ADDRESS CYBERBULLYING AT A TECHNOLOGY-BASED MIDDLE SCHOOL
Under the direction of OLIVIA M. BOGGS, Ed. D.

This qualitative case study explored the policies and procedures used to effectively address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school. The purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States. The study sought to understand educators’ experience with addressing the problem. The study explored how educators discipline students for cyberbullying, the actions they take to protect students who are cyberbullied, and the actions they take to decrease or prevent cyberbullying in their schools. Further, the study explored the challenges educators face and the procedures they follow to address and prevent cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school. The study was guided by the question, what policies and procedures are in place to effectively address cyberbullying at a technology based middle school? Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and John Rawls’ Social Justice Theory were used to as a guide to explain cyberbullying and how the phenomenon is addressed. Data were collected through open ended interview protocol with the school’s principal, assistant principal, and counselors, focus groups with teachers, and a document analysis of relevant school and school district documents. Data analysis revealed major findings

The conclusions drawn from the research findings presented in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5 suggest that utilizing policies and procedures suggested by the nine themes are effective in addressing cyberbullying at a technology based middle school. The policies and procedures used by the school were aligned to the current research about cyberbullying and how the phenomenon should be addressed by educators. Implications for future research include exploring the policies and procedures at different education levels, from the perceptions of parents and students, and among multiple cases.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In October 2006, a thirteen year old girl, named Megan Meier went into her bedroom closet and hanged herself after being bullied online. According to news reports, Megan met a young man named Josh and they became friends on a social media site called MySpace. The relationship was fine until Josh decided he didn’t want to be friends any longer and started sending Megan cruel messages online. The issue became worse when other friends and classmates started making cruel comments to Megan via social media. Later that day Megan killed herself because of the online harassment. After Megan’s death, it was discovered that Josh was not a real person. Josh was made up by Megan’s neighbors as a means to insult and harass her; a mean prank gone deadly wrong. Megan Meier’s story is among the first cyberbullying cases to receive national attention, thus showing that the way teens bully was changing (NoBullying.com, 2017).

The study focused on the growing incidents of technology used to victimize students by examining educators’ experiences with peer-on-peer cyberbullying and policies and procedures used to mitigate against it. Bullying among school children has been a problem for centuries (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Stewart, 2012). Studies on the history of bullying identify the first published research on peer victimization in schools was written by Frederick Burk in 1897 (Card & Hodges, 2006; Koo, 2007; Walton, 2005). Over the last two decades, the problem has increased exponentially with the advent of technology that allows perpetrators of bullying to remain anonymous (Cuadrado-Gordilly & Fernandez-Antelo, 2016; Palladino, Nocentini, & Menesini, 2016).

For decades, some students have found themselves to be the target of intentional, hurtful, and repeated name calling, teasing, physical attacks, and other aggressive behaviors by other students who chose the role of the aggressor (Aftab, 2014; Hinduja &
Patchin, 2010; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Mason, 2008; Stewart, 2012). The relationship between the bully and the victim is similar to that of predator and prey. In nature, the predator is the aggressor that actively seeks to weaken or annihilate its prey for survival or sport. The prey is the victim that is injured or annihilated because it tends to be weaker or less apt to escape the predator’s attack (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2014). Like the predator and prey, bullies and bullied victims are a part of each other’s environment. If there is no prey, the predator no longer has power or purpose (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2014). Therefore, the predator and prey must evolve in whatever way possible in order to survive. Just as predator and prey evolve in nature, so have bullies and bullied victims.

The manner in which students bully has evolved over time from school yard fist fights and teasing to inflicting harm through words and images via technological means (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Li, 2005). This form of bullying is known as cyberbullying, defined by Juvonen and Gross (2008) as the use of electronic, digital, internet, or other communication devices to insult, harass, or threaten another person. Aftab (2014) says cyberbullying is when a person uses technology as a weapon to intentionally target and hurt another person. Teachers and administrators now recognize bullying as a problem in schools, but many lack awareness that students are being bullied via technological means (Li, 2005; Beran & Li, in press). Cyberbullying is harmful because images and messages can be posted instantly and anonymously and can be spread to a large number of people in a very short amount of time (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; StopBullying.org, 2014). Further, unlike traditional bullying, the source of cyberbullying can be nearly impossible to trace. Additionally, StopBullying.gov (2014), states it is difficult to retract the images
and messages once they are posted and distributed via technological means. According to Tokunaga (2010), 20-40% of students in middle and high school have experienced cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying has become a major issue of concern due to the growing number of incidents that are evident by the national attention given to high profile tragedies and court cases (Davis, 2011). Davis also found that school leaders, due to inadequate advice or legal direction, feel ill-prepared to take action when cyberbullying incidents arise. Research conducted by Juvonen and Gross (2008) reveal a challenge educators encounter in regards to cyberbullying. The challenge for educators is cyberbullying is a rapidly growing problem among middle and high school students that is having a substantial impact on students and the school setting (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Newey & Magson, 2010). For example, victims of cyberbullying often retaliate against cyberbullies on school grounds, which create an opportunity for educators to get involved and address the problem (Brown, 2011; Derrick, 2008; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Further, cyberbullied victims retaliate against cyberbullies by engaging in behaviors such as physical altercations, verbal arguments, cyberbully, or committing acts of school violence (Brown, 2011; Derrick, 2008; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Morrison, 2009;), all of which cause disruptions to the learning environment. Studies by Levy et al. (2012) and Juvonen & Gross (2008) regarding online bullying found that cyberbullied victims often become bullies themselves, thus creating a cyberbullying cycle. Sixty percent of the students surveyed, in the studies above, stated they would retaliate to cyberbullying in school. An additional 28% of students surveyed said they would retaliate in school and online (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Levy et al., 2012). Research conducted by Dedman (2001) and
Li (2005) revealed that bullying has initiated serious forms of aggression which, in extreme cases, have led to intense incidents of school violence such as shootings and student suicides (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Marden, 2010; Newey & Magson, 2010). Marden also points out that even in less extreme cases, students reported feelings of anger, hostility, depression, withdrawal, lack of interest in school, and not wanting to attend school. Hinduja and Patchin (2014) add that cyberbullied victims tend to lack self-confidence (Anker; 2011; Hayes, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Marden, 2010; Morrison, 2009). Further, they are inclined to feel weak, embarrassed, depressed, and anxious which contributes to their not wanting to attend school when they are cyberbullied (Anker; 2011; Hayes, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Marden, 2010; Morrison, 2009). Victims also report thoughts of suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

When cyberbullying occurs, educators find themselves in a position to issue disciplinary consequences for bullies, while also protecting victims, based on a form of bullying that educators are not familiar with or do not understand (Derrick, 2008; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Li, 2006; Mason, 2010). The danger associated with the lack of understanding is that educators often do not realize the extent of the harm associated with this phenomenon (Alvaraz, 2013; Beran & Li, 2005; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Li, 2006). School officials and other educators have found themselves in a difficult position when addressing the issue. Educators are unclear as to what they can do to address the problem (Mason, 2010). School officials and other educators have an obligation to discipline bullies and protect victims in order to maintain a safe and secure learning environment
for all within the educational setting (Broster & Brien, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Morrison, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

Cyberbullies make life difficult for their victims through unrelenting harassment, teasing, taunting, online gossip, and embarrassing postings about the victim (Aftab, 2014; Broster & Brien, 2010; Conn, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Marden, 2010; Morrison, 2009; Olweus, 1993; Richmond, 2010; Shariff & Leanne, 2007). According to the National Crime Prevention Association (2013), more than half of students in middle and high school have experienced cyberbullying as the bully, victim, or as a bystander. Further, more than two-thirds of youth have experienced cyber threats online (Aftab, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Marden, 2010; Mason, 2008).

Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying happens 24 hours per day, seven days per week, thus giving the victim little to no escape from the constant humiliation, hatefulness, harassment, and torment (Broster & Brien, 2010; Conn, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Marden, 2010; Mason, 2008; Olweus, 1993; Richmond, 2010; Shariff & Leanne, 2007). Additionally, the bullying can be seen by many others and cyberbullies usually hide behind the anonymity of the internet (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Marden, 2010; Mason, 2008; Stopbullying.org, 2014; Tonkunaga, 2010). Cyberbullies tend to be very cunning. They are very aware of the most current tools and technologies that can be used to wreak havoc on the lives of their victims and stay off or under the radar of adults (Alvaraz, 2013).
New cell phone applications, such as Snapchat, Instagram, Vine, KIK, and Direct Messaging (DM), are making it easier for cyberbullies to keep their identities secret as they terrorize their victims to despair and in some cases to death (Alvaraz, 2013). Sadly, most adults do not understand cyberbullying and how this phenomenon affects youth (Alvaraz, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Beran &Li, 2005; Li, 2006). Many adults have no idea that some youth’s online activity is pushing other youth to the brink of death (Alvaraz, 2013). Additionally, research conducted by Hinduja & Patchin (2010) about online bullying and suicide found that “all forms of peer aggression increased the likelihood that the respondent attempted suicide. Traditional bullying victims were 1.7 times more likely and traditional bullying offenders were 2.1 times more likely to have attempted suicide than those who were not traditional victims or offenders. Similarly, cyberbullying victims were 1.9 times more likely and cyberbullying offenders were 1.5 times more likely to have attempted suicide than those who were not cyberbullying victims or offenders” (p.2).

Data from the Cyberbullying Research Center (2016) show approximately 27.9% of middle and high school students were victims of cyberbullying between 2007 and 2016. Further, the rate of victimization nearly doubled during that time, from 18.8% in 2007 to 33.8% in 2016.
The majority of youth fail to tell their parents when cyberbullying occurs out of fear of losing online and cell phone privileges (Anker, 2011; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Marden, 2010; Mason, 2008; National Crime Prevention Association, 2013). Cyberbullying incidents, such as mean text messages, threatening emails, and demeaning, hateful, or embarrassing social media post, often go unnoticed by adults, thus creating an environment for the behavior to continue to escalate due to the problem not being addressed quickly (Alvaraz, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Hinduja

Hinduja and Patchin further state that administrators tend to disregard or dismiss cyberbullying to address issues that appear, to them, to be more serious types of aggression, such as physical altercations, not realizing the possible connection between cyberbullying and aggression in the school environment.

Students express the belief that adults do not address the problem because they do not understand how it feels to be cyberbullied (Landau, 2013). Parents state that educators do not offer assistance when cyberbullying incidents are reported (Landau, 2013). Parents and students believe that educators ignore the problem thus causing cyberbullying incidents to escalate to the level where students get depressed, exhibit poor academic performance, miss school, become withdrawn, result to school violence, and in extreme cases, commit suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Hu, 2013; Landau, 2013).

Further, research shows that both cyberbullies and victims can feel the psychological effects of cyberbullying for a long-time (Landau, 2013). According to Landau (2013), some of the long lasting effects for victims and cyberbullies include anxiety disorders, panic disorder, adult depression, and suicide during their adult life. With long lasting effects in mind, educators have a responsibility to address the problem (Landau, 2013; Patchin, 2010 ;). The problem for educators is that they are required to address the issue in a manner that disciplines the cyberbully but also protects the victim in a way that is fair to both parties and prevents the situation from escalating any further (Broster & Brien, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Morrison, 2009).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:
Primary Question: What policies and procedures are in place to effectively address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school?

Sub-Questions:

1. What are educators’ experiences with addressing cyberbullying?
2. What procedures are in place to address cyberbullying in schools?
3. What policies are in place to discipline cyberbullies?
4. What procedures are used to protect victims?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States. The study sought to understand educators’ experience with addressing the problem. The study explored how educators discipline students for cyberbullying, the actions they take to protect students who are cyberbullied, and the actions they take to decrease or prevent cyberbullying in their schools. Further, the study explored the challenges educators face and the procedures they follow to address and prevent cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States.

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and John Rawls’ Social Justice Theory served as a guide for this study. Social Learning Theory suggests people learn from one another by modeling, observation, and imitation (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura (1977), one’s environment can have an impact on one’s behavior and vice versa. This theory aligned with the intent of this study because it can help explain how behaviors...
modeled in one’s environment influences one to behave including participating in cyberbullying and addressing cyberbullying. Further, this theory can help educators understand why students cyberbully and the importance of modeling desired behavior to effectively address and prevent the problem. Social justice theory is a conception of justice which provides principles of justice to regulate social order (Garrett, 2005; Rawls, 1999). Social justice theory, at its most basic core, states that each person has equal rights to basic liberties compatible with the liberties of others (Kay, 1997). The use of social justice theory is aligned with the intent of this study because it provides a clear connection between justice and fairness. This theory relates to the relationships between educators, cyberbullied student victims, and student cyberbullies and the social order of the school environment. This theory provides a connection between how educators discipline cyberbullies and protect cyberbullied victims without violating any of the students’ rights while staying within policies, guidelines, and laws.

Significance

Roberson & Hagervick (2008) state that this generation of students has the ability to use, understand, and integrate ever changing, new technologies into many facets of their lives. Therefore, school officials need to be knowledgeable about how students use technology to bully. Cyberbullying must be fully understood so that educators can do more to address the issue and eliminate these behaviors in schools (Stewart, 2012). This study will help educators and other stakeholders gain an understanding of cyberbullying. It will also bring awareness to the dangers of not addressing the problem quickly and the possible benefits of addressing the problem as soon as it is reported or avoiding the problem altogether. Further, this study will bring awareness about how understanding the
problem factors into how the problem is addressed at the school level. The research may provide educators with effective strategies on how to intervene when cyber bullying is reported and how to issue consequences to cyberbullies while also protecting victims. This study will also provide educators and other stakeholders with information to increase their knowledge about cyberbullying, which can lead to the development of anti-bullying programs and policies. Additionally, the study will introduce practices employed by other educators who effectively addressed cyberbullying (Broster & Brien, 2010).

The results of this study will benefit students because educators may be able to use this information to implement anti-cyberbullying programs to raise awareness about the problem and decrease the number of students being cyber bullied. Students involved in cyberbullying incidents may learn that educators take this matter seriously and that this behavior will not be tolerated in schools. Parents can use the information to gain knowledge about what cyberbullying is and how the issue can be addressed in schools.

The results will help teachers by providing information about what cyber bullying is and how school leaders can address the issue. Teachers can assist with implementation of anti-bullying programs, which can improve their classroom learning environments. Teachers may be introduced to new strategies about how to intervene when students report an incidence of cyberbullying. The increased awareness may reduce cyberbullying in schools.

This study can help policy makers by making them aware of the challenges educators encounter when addressing cyberbullying from a policy, or lack thereof, standpoint. The results can be used to provide information necessary for policy makers to create policies and laws that will allow educators to discipline students for a phenomenon
that starts beyond school grounds, but have an impact on the school environment. The information can be used to develop policies that would give principals and teachers the power required to intervene, discipline cyberbullies, and protect victims when incidences of cyberbullying are reported.

Procedures

The researcher conducted a qualitative study to gain an in-depth understanding of the policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school. The researcher used case study methodology to focus on a single issue of addressing cyberbullying by educators at one school. The middle school principal, assistant principal, counselors, teachers, and other certificated staff, employed by an urban school system in the southern United States were invited to participate in this study. Research suggests that cyberbullying peaks in grades 6-10 (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). Therefore, a middle school was selected as the target site for the study. The study sample and participants consisted of educators at the selected school. Through qualitative research strategies, including interviews, focus groups, and document analyses, the study addressed the research questions using Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and John Rawls’ Social Justice Theory as the lens to gain an understanding of the behaviors, perspectives, and strategies used to address cyberbullying at the site. Focus groups were conducted face to face and personal interviews were face to face. Teachers participated in focus groups while principals and counselors participated in personal interviews. The researcher asked educators open-ended interview and focus group questions. According to Merriam (2009), interviewing allows the researcher to gather information about feelings, behaviors, and interpretations that cannot be obtained via
observations. Therefore, interviewing is a quintessential tool for researchers conducting case studies (Merriam, 2009). Documentation of district and school level cyberbullying policies, prevention programs, anti-bully literature, and educators’ notes were examined to verify the policies and procedures in place to address cyberbullying in the school.

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research is used to obtain in-depth, detailed information related to a phenomenon. This method is also used to explain patterns of behavior related to a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; O’Sullivan, Rassel, & Berner, 2003) or investigate a phenomenon with intention to inform practice or expand knowledge (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research is best when researchers seek understanding about how people view and react to the world they live in (Creswell, 2007; O’Sullivan, Rassel, & Berner, 2003). The focus of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school. Therefore, a qualitative methodology in the form of a case study was chosen. Creswell (2007) states, that a case study is appropriate when a researcher seeks an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Case studies can show how and why a phenomenon happens (O’Sullivan, Rassel, & Berner, 2003).

To ensure the credibility of the study, the researcher used triangulation to gather information from multiple sources of evidence and information. Triangulation consisted of interview notes, interview transcripts, and document reviews. These documents were reviewed to identify common themes. The researcher utilized member checking by providing participants with results to obtain their views on the credibility of the findings and interpretations. Lastly, the researcher used rich, thick descriptions that provided
descriptive details of the site setting and the participants, which allow readers to make decisions about the reliability of the findings.

Limitations and Delimitations

A limitation to this qualitative design is that participants are generated based on a purposeful sampling as opposed to random sampling. Therefore, the results were suggested and cannot be applied to the general population. Additionally, due to the sensitivity of the topic, participants may not be comfortable providing full details. Participants may not fully disclose information regarding all of the procedures used to address the problem. To address this limitation, the researcher did not have administrators present during the focus group session. Additionally, the researcher informed the participants that their identities and the identity of the school will remain anonymous so participants can feel more comfortable disclosing necessary information for the study.

A delimitation of this study is that it is confined to middle school educators who are employed by a single school. Only educators at this particular school were invited to participate in this study. Therefore, this study does not account for experiences of educators’ at all educational levels or at other schools.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used operationally:

*Bully.* A bully is someone who directs physical, verbal, or psychological aggression or harassment toward others, with the goal of gaining power over or dominating another individual for the purpose of causing harm (Cohn & Canter, 2003; Stewart, 2012).
Bullying. Bullying is aggressive behavior that is hurtful, intentional, and persistent and threatens the physical and/or psychological wellbeing of the victim (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Stewart, 2012).

Cyberbullying. The mean spirited actions and “targeted” cruelty towards another person through electronic means such as internet, emails, text messages, blogs and social networking sites (Broster & Brien, 2010; Conn, 2009; Richmond, 2010; Shariff & Leanne, 2007); The National Conference of State Legislatures defines cyber-bullying as electronic harassment or electronic bullying among minors within a school context (NCSL, 2011). Juvonen and Gross (2008) define cyber-bullying as the use of electronic, digital, internet, or other communication devices to insult, harass, or threaten another person. Conn (2009) adds to the definition by calling it “a form of social cruelty.”

Cyberspace. Cyberspace is the realm of electronic communication is known as cyberspace (Dictionary.com, 2012).

Educators. For the purpose of this paper, the term educators will include school leaders, principals, teachers, counselors, and other certificated staff.

Traditional bullying. Repeated harm inflicted on a victim in the form of face to face interactions (Anker, 2011; Stewart, 2012).

Victim. The victim is the individual who is the recipient of repeated hurtful, intentional, and harmful aggressive behaviors (Cohn & Canter, 2003; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Stewart, 2012).
Direct Message. A private communication sent between friends or followers on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The message is only seen by the sender and the receiver (BIGCOMMERCE, 2017).

Facebook. A social networking website that allows users to create profiles and communicate with individuals referred to as friends (Conn, 2009; Dictionary.com, 2012).

KIK. A smartphone messenger system where users send videos and images instead of text (Davidson, 2013).

Instagram. Allows users to edit and post photos taken on their phone, and the images are publicly visible by default (Davidson, 2013).

Instant message. Internet based form of communication that allows users to send short messages to other users instantly (Anker, 2011; Stewart, 2012).

Snapchat. A mobile application for smartphones that allows users to take pictures and short videos and send them to others for a specific period of time. Once the photo is opened, it cannot be opened again. The application is designed for people aged 13 to adult (Snapchat, n.d. p.1; Davidson, 2013).

Social networking. The use of the internet sites to connect with other individuals (Dictionary.com, 2012)

Text message. Short, typed messages sent between cell phones or other mobile devices (Stewart, 2012).

Twitter. Twitter is an instant messaging system that allows users to send brief text messages to other users known as followers (Conn, 2009; PCMag.com, 2012).

Vine. Vine is a social media application where users create and post 6-second videos, which are often also shared on Twitter and Facebook (Davidson, 2013).
Summary

This study is organized and presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 describes how bullying has evolved from traditional school yard fights and taunting to electronic harassment through images and words known as cyberbullying. This chapter provided a brief overview of the negative outcomes and long term effects teens face when they are involved in cyberbullying as either a bully or a victim. The problem this phenomenon has created for educators is presented. The study is guided by the question, what policies and procedures are in place to effectively address cyberbullying at a technology based middle school? The following theories were also used to as a guide to explain cyberbullying and how the phenomenon is experienced: Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and John Rawls’ Social Justice Theory. The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of educators’ experience with cyberbullying and the policies and procedures used to address the problem. The significance of this study is the phenomenon needs to be fully understood so that educators can do more to address the issue and to bring public awareness to the problem in efforts to protect teens from the negative outcomes it brings. The qualitative procedures, definition of terms, limitations, and delimitations are also discussed in this chapter. Chapter 2 will provide a review of the literature related to cyberbullying themes and a summary.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Bullying, in any form, is not a new problem (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Newey & Magson, 2013; Stewart, 2012). In fact, the word bully dates back to the early 1500 (Harper, 2008) when basic survival was based on competition for limited resources required for living (Donegan, 2012). This desire for survival and competition for limited resources are still present today, thus creating an opportunity for bullying to occur. According to Donegan (2012), “bullying is unintentionally instilled as a survival tactic from a very young age” (p.34). Stewart (2012) states bullying is a behavior bullies voluntarily learn. Therefore, learning to bully, in any form, is a problem (Stopbullying.org, 2014). In its simplest form, the act of bullying usually involves at least two people, the bully and the victim (Donegan, 2012; Olweus, 1993; Stopbullying.org, 2014). Bullies typically harm their victims through verbal, physical, or other intimidating means as a way to boost their sense of dominance and power in order to gain some type of advantage over their victims (Aftab, 2014; Donegan, 2012; Olweus, 1993; Newey & Magson, 2013; Stopbullying.org, 2014). Although the reasons for bullying have not changed much throughout the course of time, the way in which bullying occurs has changed and evolved tremendously due to the increased use of the internet by youth (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Newey & Magson, 2013; Veenstra, 2011; Li, 2005). This literature review examines the current knowledge about cyberbullying, such as the
The evolution of the cyberbullying and its impact on students, educators, and the school environment. Specifically, this review covers information about how and why students engage in cyberbullying and discusses the various roles of those involved in the phenomenon. Additionally, this review identifies behavioral theories and legalities that connect to the phenomenon including support and challenges for educators tasked with addressing the problem.

The Evolution of Cyberbullying

The frequent use of the internet by youth has significantly changed the way bullies and victims interact with each other as well as the scars left behind from bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Newey & Magson, 2013; Veenstra, 2011; Li, 2005). Victims seldom have the ability to escape the torments they experience (Broster & Brien, 2010). Unlike the natural environment, cyber space allows bullies to torment victims 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through the use of one or more electronic means. Additionally, the cyber space environment has no boundaries and typically lacks adult supervision (Conn, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Marden, 2010; Mason, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). The lack of boundaries and supervision provide bullies the opportunity to further harm victims by sharing hurtful and incriminating information about them with countless others while leaving little to no means of escape for victims (Conn, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Marden, 2010; Mason, 2008; Richmond, 2010; Tokunaga, 2010).

Although traditional bullying and cyberbullying are similar, cyberbullying has a more lasting and devastating impact on victims (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). For example,
a victim can be the target of cyberbullying but not know the reasons why (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). According to Tokunaga (2010), cyberbullies inflict harm on the victim “without physical interaction” (p.279) and with minimal planning. The harmful actions of the cyberbully can be shared with many other people, located in many different places in a very short period of time (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Stopbullying.org, 2014). Further, the victim’s experience and the bully’s actions are often left unaddressed because adults may be unaware of what is happening with the youth in cyberspace or are slow to respond to reports of cyberbullying (Alvaraz, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Landau, 2013). For this reason, victims feel helpless and bullies feel empowered, which allows the torment to continue (Alvaraz, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Landau, 2013).

Aftab (2014) states cyberbullying is when a person uses technology as a weapon to intentionally target and hurt another person. Like traditional bullying, cyberbullying includes repeated insults, harassment, name calling, teasing, threats, or other behaviors intended to harm the targeted victim (Aftab, 2014; Broster & Brien, 2010; Conn, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Olweus, 1993; Richmond, 2010; Shariff & Leanne, 2007;). It is also defined as the mean spirited actions and targeted cruelty towards another person through electronic means such as internet, emails, text messages, blogs, and social networking sites (Broster & Brien, 2010; Conn, 2009; Richmond, 2010; Shariff & Leanne, 2007). Further, Conn (2009) refers to cyberbullying as a type of social cruelty.

The literature available about cyberbullying suggests that it is direct or indirect (Aftab, 2014; BullyingStatistics, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Direct cyberbullying occurs when the victim is directly involved (Veentra, 2011) or are purposely excluded
from online social groups (Beale & Hall, 2007; Veentra, 2011; Willard, 2007). With
direct cyberbullying, the victims recurrently receive threats, insults, name calling,
embarrassing images, and other offensive messages firsthand (Veentra, 2011). Indirect
cyberbullying does not involve the victim directly. This form of cyberbullying includes
posting disturbing images or comments about the victim to public online sites, creating
fake online profiles under the facade of the victim, spreading gossip, lies, and rumors
about the victim via electronic means, and sending embarrassing or humiliating
comments or photos about the victim using electronic mediums (Aftab, 2014;
conducted by Hinduja and Patchin, found that “mean or hurtful comments” and “rumors
spread” were the most prevalent forms of cyberbullying among teens.

Cyberbullies utilize various tools to exploit their victims. The most common tools
include computers, cell phones, tablets, portable gaming devices, emails, webpages,
instant message applications, video sharing, and social networking mediums (Beale &
Hall, 2007; Bullying Statistics, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin,
2010). The most common social networking mediums include Facebook, Instagram, Kik,
Snapchat, Twitter, Vine, and YouTube (Beale & Hall, 2007; Bullying Statistics, 2013;

In 2011, the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics conducted the School
Crime Supplement of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) focusing on
student reports of bullying and cyberbullying (US Department of Education, 2013). The
NCVS survey consisted of a population size of 24,690,000 students aged 12-18. Of those
students, nine percent (approximately 2.2 million students) reported that they experienced cyberbullying (US Department of Education, 2013). Previous research suggests that cyberbullying appears to be most prevalent in junior high school, among students in grades 7-10 (Tokunaga, 2010; Li, 2006; Morrison, 2009). In 2006, Li conducted a survey of 264 junior high school students. The purpose of the study was to investigate the nature and extent of adolescents’ experience with cyberbullying (Li, 2006). The study showed that 25% of the students surveyed were cyberbullied, while 50% of the students knew someone who was cyberbullied (Li, 2006). Aftab (2014) polled 45,000 middle and high school students in North America and found that at least 85% of those students were the targets of cyberbullying within a one year period. Middle school and high school aged students are more likely to be involved in cyberbullying than those ages associated with other school levels (Tokunaga, 2010; Li, 2006; Morrison, 2009). A study conducted by Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simmons-Morton, and Scheidt in 2001, reported that 30% of United States students in grades 6-10 have been involved in bullying incidents as either the bully, the victim, or a bystander. Bullyingstatistics.org (2013) states that more than half of the teens in the U.S. experienced cyberbullying in some form; 10-20% experience cyberbullying on a chronic basis. The data shows that cyberbullying is very prevalent among teens.

Teens spend a significant amount of time online and using technology (Bullyingstatistics.org, 2013). For most teens, online activity is the center of their social life (Bullyingstatistics.org, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). Aftab (2014) believes that incidents of cyberbullying grow as the use of technology increases and as technology
evolves. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2014), ninety-five percent of teens in the United States are online. Further, seventy-four percent of teens access the internet using mobile devices (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). Teens who use technology are more likely to be involved in incidents of cyberbullying as a victim, bully, or both; or as a bystander (Aftab, 2014; Bullyingstatistics.org, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Li, 2006; National Crime Prevention Council, 2014). Males and females are equally at risk for being cyberbullied although the methods may differ by gender (Nobullying.com, 2014).

According to the National Crime Prevention Council (2014), “Cyberbullies can be classmates, online acquaintances, and even anonymous users, but most often they do know their victims” (n.p.). Teens who are popular among their peers, who are excessively concerned about being popular, who have high social status, and who tend to be dominate over others are more likely to be cyberbullies (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Stopbullying.gov, 2014). However, teens who have low self esteem, who are depressed and anxious, who give in to peer pressure easily, who do not socially or emotionally identify well with others, or who are less involved in school are also likely to be cyberbullies (Stopbullying.gov, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Often times, cyberbullies are former friends of the victim (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014).

Stopbullying.gov (2014) states “no single factor puts a child at risk of being bullied or bullying others” (n.p.). Any youth who uses the internet or other forms of electronic communication can be a victim of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Stopbullying.gov, 2014). According to stopbullying.gov (2014), teens who are perceived to be unpopular, weak, unfamiliar, or different from their peers are at risk of being a
victim of cyberbullying. Further, teens who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT) youth, have disabilities, or are socially isolated may be at an increased risk of being cyberbullied (Stopbullying.gov, 2014).

Bystanders are individuals who witness cyberbullying but are not directly involved as the cyberbully or the victim (Stopbullying.gov, 2014). According to Salmivalli, Voeten, and Poskiparta (2011), about 30% of youth are bystanders during incidents of cyberbullying. Further, 90% of bystanders usually ignore cyberbullying or choose not to stop cyberbullying when they witness it (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011; Stopbullying.gov, 2014). Even though bystanders are not directly involved in cyberbullying, they play an important role in cyberbullying intervention (Bowers, 2014). Bystanders typically serve as the audience for acts of cyberbullying (Bowers, 2014; Cowie, 2013). However, bystanders have the potential to reduce or end cyberbullying if they chose to intervene (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Bowers, 2014; Cowie, 2013) or “take action against cyberbullying” (Cowie, 2013, p.168). According to Cowie (2013), youth are more likely to confide in their peers, which gives bystanders an opportunity to help victims and discourage cyberbullies. Additionally, bystanders are more likely to report cyberbullying and seek the help of adults when such incidents arise.

Like bystanders, parents and educators have important roles in preventing, intervening, and ending cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Bowers, 2014; Cowie, 2013). In order to prevent cyberbullying, parents can talk to their children about appropriate online behavior and monitor their children’s online activity as much as
possible (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Cowie, 2013). Parents can also teach their children good social and communication skills (National Education Association, 2016). Beyond prevention, parent should intervene when cyberbullying is reported or suspected (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). If the child is being cyberbullied, it is important for parents to show the child support, open the lines of communication, and make the child feel safe and secure (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). Additionally, parents should take appropriate action such as informing school administrators and legal authorities, if the cyberbullying crosses the line of breaking the law. If the child is a cyberbully, it is important for parents to remain calm, but acknowledge the problem (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). Further, parents need to investigate to get to the root of the problem and stop the bullying. Parents should explain how severe cyberbullying is and enforce consequences. Additionally, parents should monitor their children’s electronic activity and set controls (National Education Association, 2016; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). The challenge for parents is youth do not report incidents of cyberbullying (Cowie, 2013). Research conducted by Juvonen and Gross (2008), found that 90% of the youth they surveyed did not tell their parents about their cyberbullying experiences. Additionally, research shows that youth do not tell their parents out of fear of losing online privileges (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Stoel, 2011; Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

Educators, like parents, have a responsibility to prevent, intervene, and stop cyberbullying. To prevent cyberbullying, educators should work to establish a positive school climate and promote awareness regarding appropriate internet usage (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Levy, 2011). For example, educators should be
trained on cyberbullying and cyberbullying education should be integrated into the
school’s curriculum and culture (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Levy, 2011). According to
research conducted by Hinduja and Patchin (2015) regarding school climate, “students
who report a positive climate at school also experience fewer problematic behaviors
online” (p.1). Therefore, it is important for schools to teach students to be responsible and
safe when using technology. In regards to intervention, educators should thoroughly
investigate any reported or suspected incidents of cyberbullying, identify the parties
involved, collect evidence and data, and collaborate with parents to communicate to
students that cyberbullying is a serious offense and it will not be tolerated or dismissed
(Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Research finds that students do not
report cyberbullying to educators because they feel that educators will not do anything
about the problem, they are afraid of retaliation from the cyberbully, or they fear
educators will make the situation worse (Stoel, 2011; Mason, 2008). Further, it is also
important for educators to establish a safe or anonymous reporting system and taking
action when cyberbullying is reported. Educators must stop cyberbullying by intervening,
protecting victims, and issuing appropriate consequences to cyberbullies (Hinduja &
Patchin, 2014; Stoel, 2011; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). The challenges for educators in
having an effective role in intervention and stopping cyberbullying are many. Many times
educators are unsure how or if they have the authority to intervene, especially when the
cyberbullying occurs off of school grounds and does not directly interrupt the learning
environment (Mason, 2008); the school cannot issue consequences to a cyberbully if the
incident occurs away from the school, if school property was not used to commit
cyberbullying, or if the learning environment is not directly interrupted (Stoel, 2011). Further, it is difficult for educators to intervene or stop cyberbullying if it is not reported or if students do not cooperate during investigations. According to research, “schools have a mandated responsibility to give students a quality education” (Stoel, 2011 p. 5), but this is challenging when students learning is affected by cyberbullying (Stoel, 2011; Bhat, 2008).

How Teens Cyberbully

Cyberbullying occurs in various ways. Some cyberbullies record unauthorized videos or take unauthorized pictures of their victims and post them online or distribute videos or picture via technological means for others to see; usually without the victims’ knowledge or permission (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Cowie, 2013). Other cyberbullies harass their victims with written words sent electronically by spreading lies and rumors; sending hostile and threatening texts, emails, or social media posts; and purposely excluding the victim from online groups or social media pages (Bowers, 2014; Cowie, 2013; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). Some cyberbullies create graphic depictions of their victim with mean captions. Additionally, cyberbullies set up online polls or discussion groups for other to demean and humiliate cyberbully victims (Bowers, 2014; Cowie, 2013; Stoel, 2011; Mason 2008). Other cyberbullies go as far as sharing information that was told in confidence or “pretending to be someone else and sharing information to damage a person’s reputation” (Cowie, 2013 p.167).

Why Students Cyberbully
The reasons why cyberbullying occurs vary just as much as how the phenomenon occurs. According to Cowie (2013), “Cyberbullying often occurs in the context of relationship difficulties, such as the break-up of a friendship or romance, envy of a peer’s success, or in the context of prejudiced intolerance of particular groups on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability” (p. 167). Other reasons include interpersonal conflicts, self-esteem issues experienced by the cyberbully, social tension, the cyberbully is concerned with being important or popular, retaliation to being bullied either face to face or online, lack of sensitivity due to the anonymous nature of technology, or the cyberbully seeks power and control over another person who is considered weaker (Bowers, 2014; Cowie, 2013; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010; Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Mason, 2008).

The Effects of Cyberbullying

Bullying in any form can have major effects on students and the school environment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Cowie, 2013; Bullying Statistics, 2016). Sadly, cyberbullying can “can cause severe psychological and emotional wounds” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014, p.4) for cyberbullies, victims, and bystanders (Cowie, 2013). However, cyberbullying can have significant negative and damaging effects on teens (Bullying Statistics, 2016 Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Cowie, 2013; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010).

Effects on Students

Cyberbully victims tend to experience social isolation, loneliness, and social withdrawal which leads to depression, anger, anxiety, low self-esteem, and in extreme cases suicide (Bullying Statistics, 2016; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Cowie, 2013; Patchin
In studies conducted by Hinduja & Patchin (2014) and Cowie (2013), cyberbullied victims reported feeling psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, insomnia, abdominal pain, and nausea. Further, victims are very likely to experience a drop in academic achievement, an increase in school absenteeism, and an increase in delinquent behavior including school violence (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Cowie, 2013; Mason, 2008).

Research shows that cyberbullies experience negative effects as well. Cyberbullies often experience antisocial and maladaptive behaviors (Bullying Statistics, 2016; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Cowie, 2013; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). According to Cowie (2013), cyberbullies are more likely to abuse alcohol and develop substance dependency. Additionally, cyberbullies are also at risk of depression, anxiety, and suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Cowie, 2013; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). Like victims, cyberbullies also tend to suffer academically, have an increase in delinquent behavior including school violence (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Cowie, 2013; Mason, 2008), and feel psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches (Cowie, 2013). Further, cyberbullies are at risk of other negative consequences such suspension from school, facing legal charges, or having to register as a sex offender if the cyberbullying act included sexual content (Bullying Statistics, 2016).

Bystanders, although they are not directly involved in the act of cyberbullying, can also experience negative effects related to the phenomenon (Cowie, 2013). According to StopBullying.gov, bystanders are often feel the same effects as victims and cyberbullies. These negative effects include anxiety, depression, decrease in academic
performance, and use of drugs and alcohol (StopBullying.gov). Some of the reason bystanders experience distress include fear of the cyberbully, feeling of disassociation to the cyberbullying act itself, or feeling of helplessness in regards to helping the victim (Bowers, 2014).

Effects on the School Environment

Cyberbullying is a phenomenon that can have a major impact on the school environment. Cyberbullying can “undermine the quality of education children receive” (Stoel, 2011, p.1). Students who are engaged in cyberbullying, no matter their role, experience negative effects that have a negative impact on the school environment. For example, students engaged in cyberbullying tend to be less engaged in school. Cyberbully victims, cyberbullies, and bystanders tend to exhibit a decline in academic performance and school attendance (Stoel, 2011; Bhat, 2008; Mason, 2008). Additionally, the likelihood of school violence increases when incidents of cyberbullying is occurring among students (Li, 2006). Sadly, victims of cyberbullying tend to retaliate against cyberbullies on school grounds or the cruelty associated with cyberbullying bleeds into the school environment (Stoel, 2011; Li, 2006; Mason, 2008). According to Levy (2011), educators are faced with the reality that “anything written in a text or online chat or on a social media networking site can be forwarded to any number of people with just a few clicks, escalating the problem beyond, say, a corner of the school cafeteria” (p.2). In an article written by Levy (2011), a school administrator recalls a cyberbullying incident at their school. Per the administrator, the incident began that morning with “series of hostile text messages…By the afternoon, a fight had broken out between friends of the bully and
friends of the victim” (p.2). The administrator stated that the fight broke out because the text messages went viral very quickly. Per Levy (2011), educators can no longer ignore the effects cyberbullying has on the school environment. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2014), “students who experienced cyberbullying (both those who were victims and those who admitted to cyberbullying others) perceived a poorer climate at school than those who had not experienced cyberbullying” (p.8). Cowie (2013), found that cyberbully victims, cyberbullies, and bystanders have reported feeling unsafe and unsupported by educators at school.

**Theoretical Framework**

Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and John Rawls’ Social Justice Theory served as a guide for this study. Social Learning Theory suggests people learn from one another (Bandura, 1977) and Social justice theory is a conception of justice which relates to principals of social order (Garrett, 2005; Rawls, 1999). These theories provide a lens as to why the phenomenon happens and why the phenomenon should be addressed.

**Social Learning Theory**

Social Learning Theory is a behavioral learning theory coined by Albert Bandura in 1977. This theory incorporates early behavioral theories which include classical conditioning and operant conditioning (McLeod, 2016). This theory suggests that people learn from one another by modeling, observation, and imitation (McLeod, 2016; Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura (1977), one’s environment can have an impact on one’s behavior through the observational learning process. Based on this theory, individuals learn from observing the people around them who behave in a certain way
(McLeod, 2016; Bandura, 1977). The individuals being observed are known as the models and they demonstrate behaviors which can be seen and imitated by the observer (McLeod, 2016; Bandura, 1977). Observers are more likely to “imitate those people it perceives as similar to itself” (McLeod, 2016 p.1) and people around the observer will respond to their behavior with reinforcement or punishment. If reinforcement is rewarding, the observer will likely continue the behavior; however, reinforcement that is not rewarded is likely to be stopped or changed (McLeod, 2016; Bandura, 1977).

Further, individuals will behave in a way which they believe will earn approval because most individuals desire approval (McLeod, 2016; Bandura, 1977). However, “Bandura (1977) believes that humans are active information processors and think about the relationship between their behavior and its consequences” (McLeod, 2016 p.2).

Therefore, individuals contemplate observed behavior prior to deciding to imitate it or not. However, the final decision may be based upon the desire for approval from others such as peers, parents, etc. (McLeod, 2016; Bandura, 1977).

Social Learning Theory is aligned with the intent of this study because it can help explain how behaviors modeled in one’s environment influences one to behave including cyberbullying and addressing cyberbullying. Further, this theory can help educators understand why students cyberbully and the importance of modeling desired behavior to effectively address and prevent the problem. Additionally, the theory explains how reinforcement of the behavior or consequences for the behavior can encourage the behavior to continue, change, or stop.

Social Justice Theory
Social Justice Theory is a conception of equality that provides principles of justice to regulate social order (Garrett, 2005; Rawls, 1999). Social justice theory, at its most basic core, states that each person has equal rights to basic liberties compatible with the liberties of others (Kay, 1997). Social justice is also about people being treated equal and their basic human rights are respected and supported (Robinson, 2016). Additionally, social justice means individuals are not discriminated against for any reason (Robinson, 2016). According to Social Justice Theorist, John Rawls, social justice is considered as justice as fairness (Rawls, 2003). Rawls’ theory of social justice is about “assuring the protection of equal access to liberties, rights, and opportunities, as well as taking care of the least advantaged members of society. Thus, whether something is just or unjust depends on whether it promotes or hinders equality access to civil liberties, human rights, opportunities for healthy and fulfilling lives, as well as whether it allocates for a fair share of benefits to the least advantaged members of society (Robinson, 2016, p.1). The conception of Rawls’ theory is of the thought of a “social contract, whereby people freely enter into an agreement to follow certain rules for the betterment of everyone, without considering the implications of these rules for their own selfish gain” (Robinson, 2016 p.1; Rawls, 2003). People are willing to honor the agreement and support and follow the rules when they feel the conditions are fair (Robinson, 2016; Rawls, 2003). The rules “specify the basic rights and duties to be assigned by the main and social institutions, and they regulate the division of benefits arising from social cooperation and allot the burdens necessary to sustain it”. (Rawls, 2003 p.7; Robinson, 2016)
Robinson (2016) research on Rawls’ Social Justice Theory finds that Rawls’ principles of justice as fairness happens in four stages. Stage one is the “adoption of the principles of justice to regulate a society” (Robinson, 2016 p.2; Rawls, 2003). Stage two is setting forth the process of governance and stage three is where laws are enacted (Robinson, 2016; Rawls, 2003). Stage four is “the application of the rules by administrators, the interpretation of the constitution and laws by the judiciary, and the following of the rules by members of the society in the conditions required by justice as fairness” (Robinson, 2016 p.2; Rawls, 2003).

The use of social justice theory is aligned with the intent of this study because it provides a clear connection between justice and fairness as it relates to the relationships between educators, cyberbullied student victims, and student cyberbullies and the social order of the school environment. This theory provides a connection between how educators discipline cyberbullies and protect cyberbullied victims without violating any of the students’ rights while staying within policies, guidelines, and laws. This theory also supports the protection of rights of all individuals and an agreed upon process for addressing the phenomenon.

The Legalities of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying has created a relatively new legal issue for schools. Difficulties, related to cyberbullying, arise because educators are limited and/or are unclear as to what they can do about this issue since the actions and behaviors also take place outside of school hours and off of school grounds (Mason, 2010). Further, educators have an obligation to protect students and educators, while maintaining a safe and secure learning
environment for all within the educational setting (Broster & Brien, 2010). In contrast, educators have to balance their decisions about how to protect students and educators from cyberbullying without violating students’ protected rights (Mason, 2010).

Case Law, Court Results, and Impact on Education

The limited amount of information and the varied definitions for cyberbullying have created mixed results in court rulings. According to Mason (2010), courts send the message that educators can discipline students for cyberbullying, regardless of the origination of the action, if the act is disruptive to the school or learning environment (Mason, 2010). Mason (2010) further states, schools have the authority to intervene when the cyberbullying occurs on school grounds or when school owned technology and computers are used. On the contrary, in cases like Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School (1969, landmark), Beussink v. Woodland (1998), Coy v. BOE of North Canton City Schools (2002), Layshock v. Hermitage School District (2006), and Flaherty v. Keystone (2003), courts have favored students by protecting their first amendment free speech rights. The courts in these cases also ruled against the disciplinary measures administered to the students by the school officials. These cases suggest that a student can express his/her opinion and be protected under the first amendment law as long as the opinion is expressed without lewd, profane, or vulgar language (Conn, 2009; Mason, 2010; Policinski, 2010). The courts send the message to educators that student speech is entitled to protection even if educators disagree with what is said (Mason, 2010). According to Mason (2010), the courts also send the message that before educators can
intervene and administer discipline of alleged cyber bullying cases, educators must first determine if the actions have an effect on the school environment.

The lack of consistency in current court rulings, in regards to cyberbullying in general, show that courts do not have extensive experience in dealing with cyberbullying (Mason, 2010). According to Davis (2011), courts are using outdated free speech case law and discipline law to address a fairly new problem. This is due to the notion that technology moves faster than the law (Economist, 2009). One of the most inconsistent cases pertaining to cyberbullying is the case of Layshock v. Hermitage School District (2006). In this case, Justin Layshock, a senior and honor student, created a fake MySpace profile of his school principal. On the profile, Layshock made offensive and insulting comments about the principal. When school officials became aware of the page, Layshock was suspended and sent to an alternative school. Layshock’s parents disagreed with the discipline and sued the school district. In 2006, the court ruled in favor of the school district showing that the legal system supported the authority of the school in this matter (Layshock v. Hermitage School District, 2006). However, in 2007, the court reversed its original ruling and ruled in favor of the Layshocks by stating “the school overstepped its authority” (Layshock v. Hermitage School District, 2006).

Cyberbullying is an issue that schools should and do take very seriously due to the negative effect it can have on the school’s climate, culture, learning environment, and students (Mason, 2010; Richmond, 2010). However, the role, responsibility, and authority bestowed upon educators in dealing with this issue are limited and unclear (Mason, 2010; Richmond, 2010). Their role, responsibility, and authority are unclear due
to the nature of the act and when and where the act takes place (Richmond, 2010). In general, educators are granted the authority to discipline cyberbullying, according to the school system’s bullying/cyberbullying policy, when the act occurs on school grounds, during school hours, or when school equipment is used in the act. This authority is granted whether or not it causes material and substantial disruption to the school environment. However, the authority to discipline is not so clear cut when the act takes place absent the aforementioned factors. Therefore, moving forward with discipline can place educators in the line of fire for potential legal suits. However, several educators have taken action on the issue in spite of the potential legal ramifications. The following cases support the protection of educators from cyberbullying.

*Morse v. Frederick 551_US 2007.* In this case, Joseph Frederick held up a sign that read “Bong Hits 4 Jesus” at a school sponsored event which was held off of the school’s campus. The principal, Deborah Morse, took the sign and suspended Joseph for ten days. She referenced the school’s anti-illegal drug policy as justification for her actions. Joseph Frederick sued on the grounds that his free speech was violated. The court ruled in favor of Principal Morse stating that the school administrator had the right to discipline students for promoting illegal drug use (Morse v. Frederick 551_US 2007). Although cyberbullying cases are different from this one, it is used to justify the authority of school administrators to discipline off campus behavior, which is where cyberbullying often occurs, and school policy violations which include cyberbullying.

*Wisniewski v. Board 494 F.3d 34 (2007).* In this case, Aaron Wisniewski, an eighth grade student, used an instant message icon of a gun depicting the shooting of his
teacher. He included a message that said “Kill Mr. VanderMolen,” (Shariff, 2009; Wisniewski v. Board, 2007). Aaron was suspended from school for his action. His parents sued claiming that Aaron’s first amendment rights had been infringed upon. The court ruled in favor of the school because Aaron’s action was considered a “true threat to the school environment and was not protected under the first amendment” (Wisniewski v. Board, 2007). This case is a true cyberbully case and is used to justify when a student is not protected under the first amendment.

J.S. v. Blue Mountain School District (2008) is a major case in regards to cyberbullying and protection for educators’ authority to discipline for cyberbullying. In this case, J.S., an eighth grade student at Blue Mountain Middle School, created a fake MySpace page of the school’s principal. The page indicated that the principal was a “sex addict” and “pedophile.” J.S. created the page because she was upset with her principal about disciplining her for a dress code violation (Conn, 2009; J.S. v. Blue Mountain School, 2007; Policinski, 2008). J.S. was suspended from school because of this action. J.S. parents sued the school district for violating her first amendment right to free speech. However, the court ruled in favor of the school stating that J.S. first amendment right was not violated because her speech was “lewd and vulgar.” According to the law, lewd and vulgar speech is not protected under the first amendment (Conn, 2009; J.S. v. Blue Mountain School, 2007; Policinski, 2008). This case is important in dealing with cyberbullying cases because it justifies school officials’ authority to discipline students for using “lewd and vulgar” language that disrupt the school environment. The case, J.S.
v. **Blue Mountain School**, is also significant because it supports school officials’ authority to discipline off campus behavior that disrupts the school environment.

The internet and electronic communication has provided students with a no boundaries platform to anonymously bully other students and educators (Broster & Brien, 2010; Conn, 2009; Richmond, 2010; Stroud, 2009; Swartz, 2009). Students often say things they would not say in a face to face conversation (Stroud, 2009; Swartz, 2009). Students fail to realize that what is done is cyberspace has the potential to get them in to trouble outside of cyberspace (Broster & Brien, 2010; Conn, 2009; Richmond, 2010).

According to Mason (2010), students do not realize that cyberbullying others is an issue that schools are beginning to take very seriously due to the negative effect it can have on the school’s climate, culture, and learning environment. By the time students realize this fact, they are already in a position to be disciplined for an action they thought they were doing in secret. When students find themselves in a position to be disciplined, for their cyber indiscretions, their first reaction is that schools cannot discipline them because they created the comments and opinions outside of school, outside of school hours, and on their own computers and electronic devices (Conn, 2009; Shariff, 2009; Shariff & Leanne, 2007). They also claim their right to free speech, which is protected by the first amendment, is being violated (Conn, 2009; Shariff, 2009; Shariff & Leanne, 2007). The following cases support the students thinking are correct because these cases substantiate the protection of students’ freedom of speech in the cyber world.

basis for issues concerning the protected speech of students. The precedent established by the *Tinker* case is the standard which student free speech cases are judged. In this case, three high school students decided to protest the Vietnam War by wearing black arm bands. The principal of the school required all students to remove the bands or face suspension. His action was based upon the fear that the quiet protest would disrupt or disturb the school environment. The issue here was the Tinker teens, and their friend, refused to remove their armbands and were suspended (*Tinker v. Des Moines Ind. Comm. School Dist.*, 1969). The Tinker’s sued the school district. The court ruled in favor of the Tinkers stating that the armbands were a form of free speech and the speech did not cause a material or substantial disruption to the school environment (*Tinker v. Des Moines Ind. Comm. School Dist.*, 1969). This case is important for cyberbullying because schools have the burden to prove that student speech “materially or substantially” disrupt school. If schools cannot prove this, the courts will generally rule in favor of the student.

*Beussink v. Woodland R-IV School District*, 30 F.Supp. 2d 1175 (E.D. Mo. 1998). In the case of *Beussink v. Woodland R-IV School District*, a personal webpage was created by a high school student on his home computer. The student placed a hyperlink to his schools website. The personal page contained inappropriate and vulgar language. Another student showed the page to a teacher and the teacher informed the principal. The principal reviewed the page and the student was given a ten day suspension (*Beussink v. Woodland R-IV School District*, 1998). Beussink sued the school district stating the suspension violated his first amendment rights. The courts ruled in favor of the student on the basis that school officials cannot punish a student for content they do not like on a
student’s personal page created off campus that does not substantially disrupt the school environment (Beussink v. Woodland R-IV School District, 1998). This case is important in regards to cyberbullying because it states that school officials cannot punish a student for content they do not like on a student’s personal page created off campus that does not substantially disrupt the school environment.

Cyberbullying: Current Laws, Future Laws, and Policies and Impact on Education. Laws and policies have been unable to keep pace with technology based crimes, such as cyberbullying (The Economist, 2009). This is due to the rapid evolution of the internet and other electronic communications used by students to bully their peers in cyberspace. However, some states and school systems are taking a closer look at laws and policies regarding bullying in all forms. Currently, 44 states have bullying laws, 11 states have updated their bullying laws to include or at least acknowledge cyberbullying, and six states have separate cyberbullying laws (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). School systems and state departments of education also have policies that address bullying, which now include cyberbullying. An example of such policy is the Georgia Bullying Law O.C.G.A. 20-2-751.4. The Georgia Bullying Law O.C.G.A. 20-2-751.4. requires each school system in the state to have a bullying policy which includes cyberbullying, and a statement prohibiting bullying.

The national attention given to tragic cyberbullying cases have sparked school officials, policy makers, and lawmakers to begin the development of cyberbully laws and policies. The defamation of character and harassment of educators, as well as student suicides as a result of cyberbullying, have caused lawmakers to introduce new laws such
as the H.R. 1966-Megan Meier Cyberbullying Prevention Act and the H.R. 1589- Bullying and Gang Reduction for Improved Education Act. The H.R. 1966-Megan Meier Cyberbullying Prevention Act would amend title 18, United States Code, with respect to cyberbullying. This bill would punish perpetrators of cyberbullying to be fined, jailed for up to two years, or both if convicted. H.R. 1589- Bullying and Gang Reduction for Improved Education Act would allow the use of grant funds for bullying prevention programs. Federal Education officials are planning to release a guide on cyberbullying for school officials in 2011 (Davis, 2011).

Summary

The current understanding of cyberbullying and its effect on students and the school environment leads towards the understanding that cyberbullying is a serious issue that needs to be addressed. Research supports the need for prevention and intervention in order for educators to effectively and legally address the problem of cyberbullying. While it remains much to learn about students’ engagement in cyberbullying, the literature reveals the major themes that the behavior must be prevented from happening and addressed fairly and quickly when incidents are witnessed or reported. The literature also reveals the importance of educators, parents and students being knowledgeable about cyberbullying and being willing to address it. This is a complex but necessary task for the wellbeing of students and the school environment. This literature review assisted the researcher to develop deeper and more specific questions about the topic, which helped establish questions that will guide this research.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methods employed to address the research question presented by this qualitative case study. Chapter 3 describes the appropriateness of the case study and the case. The research design, data collection, and data analysis are described in detail for the purpose of future replication. Finally, this chapter identifies how results were reported.

Introduction

Cyberbullying is a major issue of concern for schools due to the growing number of incidents happening among teenaged youth (Davis, 2011). Educators are challenged by the fact that cyberbullying is a rapidly growing problem among middle and high school students which is having a major impact on students and the school environment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Magson, 2010). Students involved in incidents of cyberbullying can develop serious issues including lack of interest in school, decline in academic performance, withdrawal, aggression, and suicide due to depression, hostility, and shame associated with cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Landau, 2013; Li, 2005; Marden, 2010). The lasting effects of cyberbullying for victims and cyberbullies include anxiety disorders, adult depression, and suicide later in life (Landau, 2013). For these reasons, educators are have an obligation to address cyberbullying to maintain an appropriate learning environment for all students (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Broster & Brien, 2010). The challenge for educators is finding ways to disciplines the
cyberbully and protect the victim in ways that are fair to both and preventing the issue to escalate any further (Broster & Brien, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Morrison, 2009).

The qualitative case study approach was chosen for this study because the researcher wanted to gain an in-depth understanding and explanation of educators’ experience with cyberbullying and the policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at a technology based middle school in the southern United States. This study focuses on educators such as teachers, counselors, and principals, at one middle school and their experience with utilizing effective policies and procedures to address cyberbullying in the school. This study was designed to find ways to assist other educators that are seeking policies and procedures to effectively address cyberbullying in their schools.

Research Questions

Through qualitative research strategies, including interviews, focus groups, and document analyses, the study addressed the research questions using Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and John Rawls’ Social Justice Theory as the lens to gain an understanding of the behaviors, perspectives, and strategies used to address cyberbullying at the case study site. The research was guided by the following questions:

Primary Question: What policies and procedures are in place to effectively address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school?

Sub-Questions:

1. What are educators’ experiences with addressing cyberbullying?
2. What procedures are in place to address cyberbullying in schools?
3. What policies are in place to discipline cyberbullies?
4. What procedures are used to protect victims?

Research Design

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research is used to obtain in-depth, detailed information related to a phenomenon and is used to explain patterns of behavior related to a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; O’Sullivan, Rassel, & Berner, 2003). Qualitative research is best when researchers seek understanding about how people view and react to the world they live in (Creswell, 2007; O’Sullivan, Rassel, & Berner, 2003). Creswell (2007) states that a case study is appropriate when a researcher seeks an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon and when a researcher desires to study the phenomenon in its natural setting. This study focused on educators’ experiences of addressing cyberbullying in the building in which they work every day. Therefore, a qualitative methodology in the form of a case study was chosen for this study. Research suggests that cyberbullying peaks at the middle school and junior high level (Tokunaga, 2010; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Therefore, a middle school in the southern United States was selected as the case for this study. This middle school was selected because the school is a technology based school in which there is a 1:1 ratio of electronic devices and students. Students use the school issued electronic devises for educational use and for purposes in and out of the classroom. Students at this school utilize technology daily for classroom instruction and for homework. The school has an acceptable use of technology policy, anti-bully policies that include cyberbullying, and procedures aimed at preventing
cyberbullying. The study sample and participants consisted of certified educators at the selected school. The school principal, assistant principal, counselors, teachers, and other certificated staff, employed by an urban school system in the southern United States were invited to participate in this study. Through qualitative research strategies such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, this study sought to address the research questions. According to Merriam (2009), interviewing allows the researcher to gather information about feelings, behaviors, and interpretations that cannot be obtained via observations. Therefore, interviewing is a quintessential tool for researchers conducting case studies (Merriam, 2009). The researcher gained access to the school by contacting the school leader and district accountability office for permission. Once permission was granted, researcher sent emails and letters to invite educators at the school to participate in the study. The invitation letter gave an overview and purpose of the study and stated that all personal information of participants are confidential. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, in lieu of actual names, in order to maintain confidentiality.

Description of the Site

Creswell (2007) states case study “analysis consists of making a detailed description of the case and its setting” (p. 163). The selected site is a small technology-based, accelerated program middle school located in the southern United States. The school enrolls grades 6-8 and the student population is less than 700 students. The school is rich in technology as every classroom is outfitted with an Apple TV, computers, and iPads. This site uses technology daily for educational and other purposes. With that, all
students are provided with a school issued electronic device, such as an iPad, to use in for in-class instruction and for homework. The student to iPad ratio is 1:1. XYZ Technology Middle School utilizes several technology based learning management systems, which creates a virtually paperless school. Students receive and submit assignments through online platforms such as Google Classroom and iPad apps. Textbooks and other resources are primarily available electronically. However, the school has a thriving media center. The student to teacher ratio is approximately 15 to 1, while the student to counselor ratio is approximately 550 to 1.

The site has a warm and welcoming feeling when guests enter the building. Students are neatly dressed in required school uniforms, while teachers are clothed in professional dress. Principals, teachers, counselors, staff, and students happily greet each other as they move through the hallways on their way to class. There is a sense of love, respect, trust, and kindness at this school. Once the instructional period begins, it is not uncommon to see students in the hallways testing robots, recording a scene for a film project, rolling a catapult down the hall and out the door to test the projectile range, or using iPads to complete geospatial assignment. The hallways are home to displays of students’ work which have great emphasis on research in the areas of STEM (Science, Engineering, Technology, and Math). The student’s research is so groundbreaking and advanced, that visitors can hardly believe they are at a middle school! Additionally, these students have an opportunity to earn up to five high school credits, including Advanced Placement courses, while still in middle school. The school has won several state and
national awards for its innovation and use of technology to provide rigorous and relevant academic opportunities.

The site is located in a middle-class area in which the neighborhoods are home to moderately-educated young professionals. However, the school is open to middle grades students throughout the county via an application and lottery process. Therefore, the demographics, socioeconomic, and gender distribution are slightly different from traditional neighborhood middle schools. The student body demographics are 41% Caucasian, 40% Black, and 19% other. Additionally, the males outnumber the females. Less than 47% of the student body qualifies free or reduced lunch. Less than 7% of students are learning disabled. However, the school has a large gifted and talented program. Forty-four percent of the students are enrolled in the Gifted and Talented Program. In 2016, less than 20% of students received disciplinary actions.

Reason for Site Selection

According to Bullyingstatistics.org (2013), the time teens spend online and using technology is substantial because it is integrated into their everyday lives (Costello and Ramo, 2017). Lenhart (2015) found that 92% of teens aged 13-17 go online daily and use several social networking sites at a time (Costello and Ramo, 2017). Aftab (2014) expands this thought by stating that cyberbullying incidents increase as the use of technology rises and technology advances. Further, teens that use technologies have a higher likelihood of being involved in incidents of cyberbullying (Aftab, 2014). Research conducted by Tokunaga (2010) and Juvonen & Gross (2008) suggests that cyberbullying peaks at the middle school and junior high school levels. Per Cyberbullying.org (2017),
educators are usually the first ones to notice signs of cyberbullying and bullying with
students. Therefore, this site was selected because it is a technology based middle school
that uses technology daily for educational and other purposes.

Population, Sample, and Participants

The population for the study is all of the certificated educators, at the middle
school level, currently employed by the selected school system in the 2017. For the
purpose of this study, certified educators include teachers, counselors, and administrators.
Therefore, the population for this study is 474 certified educators.

The study sample and participants consisted of educators at the selected middle
school. The sample size is 53. The school principal, assistant principal, counselors,
teachers, and other certificated staff, employed by XYZ Middle School in an urban
school system in the southern United States were invited to participate in this study. A
strategy known as purposeful selection was used for this study because the site had the
characteristics the researcher wanted; only teachers, counselors, and principals at the
chosen site were invited to participate in this study. According to Maxwell (2005),
purposeful selection is used when a researcher intentionally selects specific persons,
settings, or activities to obtain information that cannot be obtained from other options.
Selecting educators to participate in interviews and focus groups for this study was
intentional in that they work in the middle school that has a focus on technology in which
students use the internet and technology daily. Additionally they provide unique
information that helped the researcher gain a deeper understanding of the policies and
procedures related to the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 2009). Of the 53
contacted, eight educators responded and agreed to participate in the study. The participants included the principal, assistant principal, two counselors, and four teachers. The participants were selected because their role at the site best allow the researcher to address the questions that guided the study. According to Cyberbullying.org (2017), the initial signs of cyberbullying and bullying among students are noticed by teachers and administrators.

The participants have varied experience and backgrounds in education. Dr. Paul is a middle aged white male principal who has been in school administration for over 20 years. His administrative background includes experience at the elementary, middle, and high school levels throughout the southeastern United States. Dr. Andrews is a middle aged black male assistant principal who has been in school administration less than 10 years. Ms. Olson is a middle aged white female who has been a school counselor for twelve years. She has experience as a school counselor at all grade levels, but worked as a high school counselor the longest. Mrs. Hart is a young white female who has been a school counselor for six years at the elementary and middle school levels. This is her first year as a counselor at XYZ Technology Middle School. Prior to becoming a school counselor, Mrs. Hart earned an undergraduate degree in Child Development and worked as a Pre-K teacher.

Ms. Brown is a young black female who is in her first year as a certified teacher and a first year teacher at XYZ Technology Middle School. Ms. Brown teaches 7th grade. Prior to teaching, she worked with teens as a group counselor for 10 years. Mr. Sims is an older white male who teaches 7th grade math. He been a teacher in the XYZ School
District for 25 years and has been teaching at XYZ Technology Middle School since it started 4 years ago. Mr. Sims was in the military for twelve years prior to becoming an educator. Ms. Smith is a white female who teaches science. Ms. Smith has been teaching for seven years and she has taught 6th and 7th grades. Ms. Joyce is a young white female teacher teaching 7th grade social studies. She has taught at the middle and high school levels and has been teaching at XYZ Technology Middle School for four years.

Institutional Review Board Approval

Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher contacted the school site and the school district to obtain the necessary permissions to conduct the data collection. Per the school district, the researcher was required to complete a Request to Conduct Research for the school district. After permission was granted by the school district, the researcher submitted an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and supporting paperwork to Mercer University Office of Research Compliance. The IRB approval was received in March of 2017 and a copy was forwarded to the school district and selected site.

Materials/Instruments

After receiving IRB approval from Mercer University, the researcher sent a letter of invitation, a copy of the IRB approval, and a copy of the informed consent to the selected site’s principal. After receiving approval from the principal, the researcher sent a letter of invitation to teachers, principals, and counselors at the site inviting them to participate in the research study. Educators interested in participating in the study called and emailed the researcher to express interest. The researcher followed-up with
volunteers to provide details on date, times, and locations for interviews and focus groups. Before starting the interviews and focus groups, participants had an opportunity to review and sign an informed consent and ask questions. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, in lieu of actual names, in order to maintain confidentiality.

An open-ended interview protocol was used as the instrument to answer the research questions for this study. The researcher asked educators eleven open-ended interview and focus group questions. The eleven questions were developed based on the literature in chapter 2 which states educators must stop cyberbullying by intervening, protecting victims, and issuing appropriate consequences to cyberbullies (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Stoel, 2011; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). The questions sought to gain an in-depth understanding of policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States. The questions sought to understand educators’ experience with addressing the problem; explore how educators discipline students for cyberbullying, the actions they take to protect students who are cyberbullied, and the actions they take to decrease or prevent cyberbullying in their schools. Further, the questions sought to explore the challenges educators face and the procedures they follow to address and prevent cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school. According to Merriam (2009), interviewing allows the researcher to gather information about feelings, behaviors, and interpretations that cannot be obtained via observations. Therefore, interviewing is a quintessential tool for researchers conducting case studies (Merriam, 2009).
The media center at the school was used for the focus group that was held after school, while the main office conference room at the school was used for the focus group session held during the participating teachers’ planning period. The researcher met with the counselors, principal, and assistant principal in their offices to conduct the one on one interviews. The researcher used a voice recorder to record interviews and focus groups as well as took notes. Additionally, the researcher used a notebook to take notes, and a computer to summarize notes, transcribe interviews, and save data in an electronic format.

**Data Collection, Processing and Analysis**

The researcher served as the sole data collector, which is appropriate for qualitative research. The researcher used interviews, focus groups, and document analysis as the methods to collect data all of which are suitable for collecting data for a case study (Creswell, 2007). The researcher conducted and completed focus groups, interviews, and data analysis within a four-week period. The administrative staff and counselors were interviewed individually, while teachers participated in focus groups. Interviews were conducted face to face in the participants’ offices. The first focus groups was conducted face to face at the school immediately after the school day ended, while the second focus group was conducted during the school day during the participating teachers’ planning period. The researcher asked educators open-ended interview questions. At the discretion of the interviewees, documentation of cyberbullying policies, prevention programs, anti-bully literature, and educators’ notes were examined to determine the procedures that are employed to address cyberbullying at the school. For the document analysis, the
researcher reviewed the cyberbullying policies and procedures at the school and district level. These documents included the district Student Code of Conduct, the school’s Student Handbook, Bullying Incident Investigation Forms, CyberSmart Survey Report, the district’s Policy on Bullying/Cyberbullying, and counselor’s presentations on Netiquette: Cyber Etiquette. These documents were analyzed based on the research questions and responses from participants to identify themes. The document analysis provided insight into the policies and procedures used by the participants when addressing cyberbullying at the selected site.

The researcher followed steps outlined by Creswell (2007) which included (A) manage data by preparing, organizing, and transcribing data, (B) explore and code the data, (C) describe the findings and classify to form patterns or themes and (D) directly interpret the results. The preliminary exploration of the data analysis methods included the reading of interview/focus group transcripts, observational notes, field notes, and documents and reviewing the voice recordings taken during interviews and focus groups. These transcripts, notes, and document analysis notes were read several times during the analysis phase of the study to gain the essence of the study. The researcher used a voice recorder to record interviews and focus groups as well as took notes. At the end of each interview, focus group, and observation, the researcher reviewed field notes and summarized preliminary findings to identify themes related to the research questions. The researcher also utilized member checking at the end of each interview and focus group to obtain participant feedback to ensure the researcher captured and understood the message the participants wanted to convey in regards to addressing cyberbullying at the school.
site. The data gathered from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis was initially analyzed using open coding and then grouped by themes. Documents, notes, and interview and focus group responses were reviewed several times on different days to identify themes. The researcher transcribed data to look for emerging themes and patterns. Field notes, document analyses, interviews, and focus group responses were placed in charts and themes were identified. The results identified 9 emergent themes, which allowed for a more accurate account of what participants shared and allowed the researcher to provide rich details and descriptions (Creswell, 2007). Focus group and interview recordings and transcripts as well as other documents used for the study, are locked in a cabinet in the researchers home office. All information will be discarded at the conclusion of the study according to IRB regulations.

Addressing Bias

The researcher is a district-level program manager for Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) in an urban school district in the southern United States. In this position, the researcher is responsible for assisting the CTAE Director with comprehensive school improvement as well as implementing and managing all aspects of CTAE programs including curriculum, budget, professional development, instruction and related services. The researcher also assist secondary administrators with all aspects of CTAE programs at their school, including the purchase and use of technology for teachers and students enrolled in CTAE programs. The researcher is an advocate for the use of technology. However, the researcher is not a school administrator and does not
interact with students on a daily basis. Therefore, there are no professional biases identified at this time due to the nature of the study.

Credibility and Reliability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is a more appropriate term than validity when establishing validity for qualitative studies. With credibility, internal validity is established by verifying that the results and findings of the data can surely be believed as true (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the credibility of the study, the researcher used triangulation to gather information from multiple sources of evidence or information. Triangulation consisted of interview and focus group notes, interview and focus group transcripts, field notes, and document reviews. These aforementioned documents were compared to identify common themes. The researcher utilized member checking by providing participants results to obtain their views on the credibility of the findings and interpretations. Lastly, the researcher used rich, thick description that provided descriptive details of the site setting and the participants, which allow readers to make decisions about the reliability of the findings.

Limitations and Delimitations

A limitation to this qualitative design is that participants were generated based on purposeful sampling as opposed to random sampling. Therefore, the results were suggested and cannot be applied to the general population. Additionally, due to the sensitivity of the topic, participants may not be comfortable providing full details. Participants may not fully disclose information regarding all of the procedures used to address the problem. To address this limitation, the researcher did not have administrators
present during the focus group session. Additionally, the researcher informed the
participants that their identities and the identity of the school will remain anonymous so
participants can feel more comfortable disclosing necessary information for the study.

A delimitation of this study is that it is confined to middle school educators who
are employed by a single school. Only educators at this particular school were invited to
participate in this study. Therefore, this study does not account for experiences of
educators’ at all educational levels or at other schools.

Summary

A case study approach was chosen for this study because the researcher wanted to
gain an in-depth understanding of the policies and procedures used to address
cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school. During interviews and focus groups,
the researcher gathered data by asking principals, teachers, and counselors open-ended
interview questions about their experiences with addressing cyberbullying at the
technology-based middle school. A notebook and voice recorder were used to record
educator responses, which were transcribed to determine themes. The researcher also
conducted document analysis of policies and procedures related to preventing and
addressing cyberbullying at the school. The researcher reviewed all gathered data to look
for emerging themes. To ensure the credibility of the study, the researcher used
triangulation to gather information from multiple sources of evidence or information. The
researcher also utilized member checking by providing participants results to obtain their
views on the credibility of the findings and interpretations. Limitations to this qualitative
design were participants are selected based on purposeful sampling and the sensitivity of
the topic might limit participants desire to fully disclose information. Participants were generated based on purposeful sampling as opposed to random sampling; therefore, the results will be suggested and cannot be applied to the general population. The delimitation is only educators at this particular school will be invited to participate in this study. Therefore, this study will not account for experiences of educators at all educational levels or at other schools.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

According to the Cyberbullying Research Center, 34% of middle and high school students were victims of cyberbullying in 2015, which was up from 18.8% in 2007. A recent study, of 5,700 middle and high school students, conducted by Patchin and Hinduja (2016) found that 12% of respondents admitted to being a cyberbully at some point in their life. In 2013, Patchin and Hinduja (2013) conducted a study about the influence parents, educators, and peers have on youth in regards to cyberbullying. Over 4000 students in grades 6-12 participated in the study. The study sought to find out if students were more likely to participate in cyberbullying if their close friends did so and if students were less likely to participate in cyberbullying if they knew parents and educators would give serious sanctions. Results of the study revealed that students were more likely to participate in cyberbullying if their friends did so. However, students were less likely to participate in cyberbullying if they knew they would receive a serious sanction for their actions.

Using Social Learning Theory and Social Justice Theory as lenses, the researcher sought to investigate the policies and procedures educators used which may have contributed to cyberbullying being successfully addressed at a technology based middle school in the southern United States. The purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States. The study sought to understand
educators’ experience with addressing the problem. The study explored how educators discipline students for cyberbullying, the actions they take to protect students who are cyberbullied, and the actions they take to decrease or prevent cyberbullying in their schools. Further, the study explored the challenges educators face and the procedures they follow to address and prevent cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States. Chapter 4 will present a description of the case, its respondents, and an overview of the study and the results of the data collected through interviews, focus groups, and document analysis.

Description of the Case

This qualitative case study focused on the policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States. The site investigated this study is a small technology-based, accelerated program middle school located in the southern United States. The school enrolls grades 6-8 and the student population is less than 700 students. The school is rich in technology as every classroom is outfitted with an Apple TV, computers, and iPads. This site uses technology daily for educational and other purposes. With that, all students are provided with a school issued electronic device, such as an iPad, to use in for in-class instruction and for homework. The student to iPad ratio is 1:1. XYZ Technology Middle School utilizes several technology based learning management systems, which creates a virtually paperless school. Students receive and submit assignments through online platforms such as Google Classroom and iPad apps. Textbooks and other resources are primarily available electronically. However, the school has a thriving media center. The student to teacher
ratio is approximately 15 to 1, while the student to counselor ratio is approximately 550 to 1.

The site has a warm and welcoming feeling when guests enter the building. Students are neatly dressed in required school uniforms, while teachers are clothed in professional dress. Principals, teachers, counselors, staff, and students happily greet each other as they move through the hallways on their way to class. There is a sense of love, respect, trust, and kindness at this school. Once the instructional period begins, it is not uncommon to see students in the hallways testing robots, recording a scene for a film project, rolling a catapult down the hall and out the door to test the projectile range, or using iPads to complete geospatial assignment. The hallways are home to displays of students’ work which have great emphasis on research in the areas of STEM (Science, Engineering, Technology, and Math). The student’s research is so groundbreaking and advanced, that visitors can hardly believe they are at a middle school! Additionally, these students have an opportunity to earn up to five high school credits, including Advanced Placement courses, while still in middle school. The school has won several state and national awards for its innovation and use of technology to provide rigorous and relevant academic opportunities.

The site is located in a middle-class area in which the neighborhoods are home to moderately-educated young professionals. However, the school is open to middle grades students throughout the county via an application and lottery process. Therefore, the demographics, socioeconomic, and gender distribution are slightly different from traditional neighborhood middle schools. The student body demographics are 41%
Caucasian, 40% Black, and 19% other. Additionally, the males outnumber the females. Less than 47% of the student body qualifies free or reduced lunch. Less than 7% of students are learning disabled. However, the school has a large gifted and talented program. Forty-four percent of the students are enrolled in the Gifted and Talented Program. In 2016, less than 20% of students received disciplinary actions. The principal of XYZ Technology Middle School shared that the staff has remained consistent with very little turnover within the 4 years the school has been open. However, roughly 18% of the teachers have taught less than 3 years. Counselor one and two of the teacher participants have been at XYZ Technology Middle School since it opened four years ago, while one counselor and two teachers have been at the school two years or less. The principal has over 20 years of leadership experience across the elementary, middle, and high school levels and has been at XYZ Technology Middle School since it opened four years ago. The principal believes that technology and high standards are essential and that it is important for the school culture to be a place of “love, trust, and respect” for all. The assistant principal has less than 10 years of leadership experience, but has been at XYZ Technology Middle School since it opened four years ago. The principal and assistant principal have a great working relationship with each other and the rest of the staff at the school.

Respondents

This case study employed open-ended interviews for use in focus group with certified teachers and one on one interviews with XYZ Technology Middle School’s principal, assistant principal, and both counselors. Additionally, document analysis of the
district’s Student Code of Conduct, the school’s Student Handbook, Bullying Incident Investigation Forms, CyberSmart Survey Report, the district’s Policy on Bullying/Cyberbullying, and counselor’s presentations on Netiquette: Cyber Etiquette was conducted. These documents were analyzed based on the research questions and responses from participants to identify themes. The document analysis provided insight into the policies and procedures used by the participants when addressing cyberbullying at the selected site.

Demographics of Respondents

Participation in this study required that the respondent was a principal, assistant principal, counselor, or certified teacher at XYZ Technology Middle School. Fifty-three certified educators including the principal, assistant principal, counselors, and teachers employed by XYZ Middle School were invited to participate in this study. Of the fifty-three, eight responded and agreed to participate in the study. All participants signed the university approved Informed Consent Letter prior to participating in audio recorded focus group and one on one interviews. Brief descriptions of the participants are listed below. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Dr. Paul is a middle aged white male principal who has been in school administration for over 20 years. His administrative background includes experience at the elementary, middle, and high school levels throughout the southeastern United States. Dr. Paul has been at the same technology-based middle school since it started four years ago. He was instrumental in starting the school and guiding the school’s vision. Dr. Paul is passionate about technology, high academic and character standards for students, and
creating a culture of “love and mutual respect among everyone in the building.” Dr. Paul is very serious about preventing and addressing cyberbullying; therefore, everyone in the building, including students, and parents are familiar with the policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at XYZ Technology Middle School.

Dr. Andrews is a middle aged black male assistant principal who has been in school administration less than 10 years. He has been at XYZ Technology Middle School since it started four years ago. Dr. Andrews shares Dr. Paul’s passion for technology, high academic and character standards for students, and creating a positive culture of love, respect, and high achievement. Additionally, he believes it is important to “teach students how to be good digital citizens.” Dr. Andrews is often the first point of contact when teachers refer students to administration for discipline.

Ms. Olson is a middle aged white female who has been a school counselor for twelve years. She has experience as a school counselor at all grade levels, but worked as a high school counselor the longest. Ms. Olson is in her fourth year as a counselor at XYZ Technology Middle School. Prior to becoming a school counselor, Ms. Olson earned an undergraduate degree in Psychology and worked as a Social Worker. She also holds an Education Leadership Specialist Degree. Ms. Olson feels XYZ Technology Middle School has a “culture of kindness.” She also feels that counselors play a vital role in addressing cyberbullying at this school.

Mrs. Hart is a young white female who has been a school counselor for six years at the elementary and middle school levels. This is her first year as a counselor at XYZ Technology Middle School. Prior to becoming a school counselor, Mrs. Hart earned an
undergraduate degree in Child Development and worked as a Pre-K teacher. At XYZ Technology Middle School, Mrs. Hart was given the task of creating lessons to teach lessons about character traits and the use of technology. She is also responsible for administering the CyberSmart Survey to students and coordinating Netiquette and Cyberbullying training for students, parents, and teachers. Mrs. Hart shared that she receives reports of cyberbullying “at least once a week.” With that, she feels challenged to build a curriculum to help address the cyberbullying issue in a proactive way.

Ms. Brown is a young black female who is in her first year as a certified teacher and a first year teacher at XYZ Technology Middle School. Ms. Brown teaches 7th grade. Prior to teaching, she worked with teens as a group counselor for 10 years. Ms. Brown has direct experience with addressing cyberbullying among students in her class, which rose to the level of referring students to administration. She is familiar with the policies and procedures to address cyberbullying at XYZ Technology Middle School. Ms. Brown feels that XYZ Technology Middle School does an effective job of addressing cyberbullying, but she wants a curriculum developed for “Netiquette…a simulation where cyberbullying and netiquette is presented to students in a way that is their social reality.”

Mr. Sims is an older white male who teaches 7th grade math. He been a teacher in the XYZ School District for 25 years and has been teaching at XYZ Technology Middle School since it started 4 years ago. Mr. Sims was in the military for twelve years prior to becoming an educator. Like Ms. Brown, he has had direct experiences with addressing cyberbullying in his class. However, he was able to address those experiences at the
classroom level. Although his experience with addressing cyberbullying was at the classroom level, Mr. Sims is very familiar with the policies and procedures in place to address cyberbullying at XYZ Technology Middle School.

Ms. Smith is a white female who teaches science. Ms. Smith has been teaching for seven years and she has taught 6th and 7th grades. She is currently in her fourth year teaching at XYZ Technology Middle School. Unlike Ms. Brown and Mr. Sims, Ms. Smith has not had to address cyberbullying in her classroom. Instead she has heard students taking about cyberbullying and has had to address students picking at each other verbally. In those instances, Ms. Smith “educates students on the risks and concerns” associated with cyberbullying. Ms. Smith is familiar with the policies and procedures to address bullying and cyberbullying at XYZ Technology Middle School and has referred students to the counseling department for such behaviors.

Ms. Joyce is a young white female who teaches 7th grade social studies. She has taught at the middle and high school levels and has been teaching at XYZ Technology Middle School for four years. Like Ms. Smith, she has not had to address cyberbullying in her classroom. However, she addresses it outside of her classroom. Additionally, she is familiar with the policies and procedures to address cyberbullying at XYZ Technology Middle School should she find herself in a position to address the phenomenon in her classroom.

Findings

The data from interviews and the focus groups were transcribed by the researcher verbatim along with reviewing the six documents used for document analysis. All
documents examined are related to the policies and procedures currently used by the school to address cyberbullying at the school. After the transcription process, an open coding process was used. The responses from interviews and the focus groups were organized into 96 initial codes. These codes are representative of the participants’ responses to the interview questions related to the research questions and Social Learning Theory and Social Justice Theory theoretical frameworks. The researcher reviewed codes to look for emerging themes, patterns, and concepts. The researcher grouped similar codes together. The grouped codes were reviewed again and 9 themes emerged. The themes include 1. Address Incidents Immediately, 2. Be Proactive: Students Are Taught Netiquette, 3. Challenges, 4. Consistent Procedures When Addressing Cyberbullying, 5. Counselors are Key People, 6. Discipline for the Cyberbully is Incremental and Progressive, 7. Protect the Victim, 8. Loving School Culture, and 9. Teachers are the Frontline. Table 1 identifies the themes acknowledged by the participants and Table 2 shows the themes associated with the research questions.
Table 1

Major Themes Identified by Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme</th>
<th>Dr. Paul (Principal)</th>
<th>Dr. Andrews (Asst. Principal)</th>
<th>Ms. Olson (Counselor 1)</th>
<th>Mrs. Hart (Counselor 2)</th>
<th>Teacher Focus Group</th>
<th>Document Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address incidents immediately</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be Proactive: Students are taught Netiquette</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent Procedures when addressing Cyberbullying</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselors are Key People</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline for the Cyberbully is Incremental and Progressive</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect the victim</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loving School Culture</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are the Frontline</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Research Questions and Associated Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Question: What policies and procedures are in place to effectively address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school?</td>
<td>(1) Address Incidents Immediately; (2) Be Proactive: Students Are Taught Netiquette; (3) Challenges; (4) Consistent Procedures When Addressing Cyberbullying; (5) Counselors are Key People; (6) Discipline for the Cyberbully is Incremental and Progressive; (7) Protect the Victim; (8) Loving School Culture; and (9) Teachers are the Frontline;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are educators’ experiences with addressing cyberbullying?</td>
<td>(3) Challenges; (4) Consistent Procedures When Addressing Cyberbullying; (5) Counselors are Key People; (9) Teachers are the Frontline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What procedures are in place to address cyberbullying in schools?</td>
<td>(1) Address Incidents Immediately; (2) Be Proactive: Students Are Taught Netiquette; (8) Loving School Culture; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What policies are in place to discipline cyberbullies?</td>
<td>(6) Discipline for the Cyberbully is Incremental and Progressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What procedures are used to protect victims?</td>
<td>(7) Protect the Victim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Primary Research Question- Question 1

What policies and procedures are in place to effectively address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school? Research question 1 is the overarching question that guided this study. Therefore, it captures all nine emerging themes. These themes were significant throughout each phase of the data collection process. Additionally, research
question 1 shows the connection between the theoretical frameworks and the research finding. Four sub-questions were significant to this study and helped the researcher obtain more detailed information to better answer the primary research question. Each of the four sub-research questions were associated with specific themes. Therefore, data from the interviews, focus groups, and data analysis will be discussed by the sub-research questions and related themes, all of which will answer the primary research question.

Sub-Research Question 1

What are educators’ experiences with addressing cyberbullying? The findings of sub-research question 1 are grouped by 4 emerging themes: (a) Consistent Procedures When Addressing Cyberbullying; (b) Counselors are Key People; (c) Teachers are the Frontline; and (d) Challenges. These themes were significant throughout each phase of data collection and were common in participants’ discussion of their experiences with addressing cyberbullying at XYZ Technology Middle School. The findings for this question include excerpts taken from the raw data taken from interviews with the principal, assistant principal, counselors and teacher focus groups. Some excerpts from the data analysis is also included as information in the documents provide evidence of the emerging themes. However, documents will not be cited as a means to maintain anonymity of XYZ Technology Middle School and the XYZ School District.

Consistent Procedures When Addressing Cyberbullying. All participants spoke about their experiences with addressing cyberbullying at XYZ Technology Middle School. While their experiences were unique, the commonality is that their procedures are consistent when they address cyberbullying at the school. All participants are familiar
with the policies and procedures outlined in the district Student Code of Conduct to address student discipline including cyberbullying. In addition to the district Student Code of Conduct, the school utilizes a school level handbook containing student behavior expectation and consequences based on a “ticket system.” Students, parents, and school staff are all familiar with these documents which outline policies and procedures. The principals are the individuals who investigate reported incidents of cyberbullying. They utilize a form that gathers information about the cyberbullying incident reporter, parties involved in the incident, and other detailed information about the incident including artifacts such as screen shots, messages, etc. As they conduct their investigation, principals meet with the parties involved and witnesses, contact parents, talk to teachers, and refer involved students to counselors. Once the investigation is complete, the principals issues consequences as outlined in the student handbook or the district Student Code of Conduct. The severity of the consequence is based on the investigation findings and number of offenses the cyberbully already has. According to the district’s policy on student discipline as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct, the principal must follow a progressive discipline process. If the investigation finds it was just an incident of poor judgment, the principal or assistant principal may utilize the ticket system based on the school’s student handbook. If the incident is cyberbullying, the principal and assistant principal will follow the student disciplinary process as outlined in the district’s Student Code of Conduct. Consequences can range from something as mild as detention up to suspension. In egregious cases, students can be sent to an alternative school or given expulsion. The school district policy warrants that “all charges of bullying [to include
cyberbullying] must be investigated, documented, and placed in the student’s discipline file.” The assistant principal, Dr. Andrews, shared that the administrative staff is successful with addressing cyberbullying because “we use the same model and step in every situation.” By “we,” Dr. Andrews is referring to himself and the principal. Other consistent procedures include students involved in incidents of cyberbullying or suspected incidents of cyberbullying are referred to the counseling staff by the principals, teachers, or students can self-refer. At the classroom level, teachers use consistent procedures by utilizing the ticket system, referring students involved in cyberbullying incidents or suspected incidents to the school counselors, and by following the district Student Code of Conduct procedure by reporting cyberbullying incidents to the principals. Counselors also follow the district Student Code of Conduct procedure for cyberbullying by reporting incidents to the principals. All participants feel that this consistency in procedures is vital in effectively addressing cyberbullying at XYZ Technology Middle School because students know what to expect if they find themselves involved in incidents of cyberbullying.

Counselors are Key People. The theme “Counselors are Key People” emerged as all respondents stated how counselors are utilized to address cyberbullying at the school. The district policy and procedure includes counseling as an option for students who are involved in cyberbullying incidents as the cyberbully or victim, but counseling is not mandated. However, students, teachers, and administrators at XYZ Technology Middle School value the services provided by the counseling department and the support the counselors give when addressing cyberbullying. Students were not invited to participate
in this study, but the researcher observed students visiting the counselor’s office to report a cyberbullying incident. The researcher overheard the students talking to each other about how Mrs. Hart could help them because she helped a friend of one of the students with a similar issue. Additionally, the principal, assistant principal, and all of the teachers from the focus groups emphasized how much they refer students to the counselors when they become aware of cyberbullying or potential cyberbullying incidents. The teacher, Ms. Brown states, “The counselors are great! The counselors and administration are very involved when bullying and cyberbullying situations are identified or reported.” The teachers like that the counselors follow-up with students who were involved in cyberbullying. According to the teachers and the counselors, the counselors follow-up with the students on a regular basis to make sure they are ok emotionally and to prevent any type of retaliation. Counselors are also key in providing care and support to cyberbully victims.

Teachers are the Frontline. The theme teachers are the front line was prevalent among the principals, counselors, and teachers. Teachers are the closest to the students on a day to day basis. Students practically spend their entire school day with a teacher. For that reason, teachers are usually the first to experience addressing the issue of cyberbullying. During the focus group, two teachers shared their experiences with addressing cyberbullying directly. Mr. Sims shared a cyberbullying incident that happened in his class. He told the researcher that a male student sent an inappropriate message to another student using a different student’s electronic device. When the issue was brought to Mr. Sims’ attention, he issued the male student a yellow ticket (parent
contact) and contacted the male student’s parent. Mr. Sims also had the student read what he wrote to his parent. Mr. Sims did not have any more cyberbullying type issues with that male student. Ms. Brown shared two experiences with addressing cyberbullying. Her first experience happened when one of her students started recording another student without the student’s permission. Ms. Brown spoke to the student, who did the recording, about how the student’s actions can be considered cyberbullying. In this case Ms. Brown states, “Sometimes students aren’t aware that they are participating in cyberbullying.” The second experience shared by Ms. Brown involved a student taking a picture and putting it on Snap Chat. The student took a picture of another student, put a comment on the picture, and sent the picture to other students. This issue was referred to administration. Ms. Brown shared additional feelings about teachers’ experiences with cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying happens more on students’ personal devices and usually happens when there is no direct teacher supervision like during class changes, in the bathroom, etc. When cyberbullying happens, teachers have to deal with it after the fact; when a student has been negatively impacted. Teachers’ experiences come at the tail end. Teachers have to fix it. Teachers have to adjust when a student is moved from one homeroom to another homeroom.

Ms. Smith and Ms. Joyce did not have any experiences in their classes but they have sent students to the counseling department for cyberbullying incidents the students were involved in. However, both teachers know the policies and procedures they must follow if they ever need to address cyberbullying.

Challenges. All respondents spoke about the different challenges they encounter in regards to addressing cyberbullying. This theme is represented by the overall complexity of the phenomenon itself. Dr. Paul stated that a challenge he faces as the
principal is that “there is no silver bullet to combat the issue,” meaning there is no one size fit all solution to combating or addressing cyberbullying. Multiple methods have to be used. The fact that students use technology daily is a challenge, especially when students use personal devices. The school can monitor the school issued devices, but educators have little control over student use of personal devices. The student handbook and the district Student Code of Conduct, both have acceptable use policies for personal devices. However, there are limits to what educators can do when incidents occur on personal devices. The devices can be confiscated for a time and returned to parents, but that is about it. One of the school counselors, Ms. Olson, shared her views about the challenges she experience in regards to addressing cyberbullying.

It is a major ongoing problem. It’s big! Technology is so fast and students are finding apps to hide cyberbullying. Dealing with the afterschool stuff that affects the students at school. This issue is so new and everyone is still trying to figure out the best way to handle the situations; each case is different. Getting parents to monitor their child’s actions is a challenge.

Mrs. Hart, the second counselor and individual tasked with teaching lessons about character traits and technology use at XYZ Technology Middle School, discussed the challenges she experiences in regards to addressing cyberbullying.

It’s sticky. Sometimes it is hard to tell who the actual victim is. Students don’t report incidents in a timely manner. Sometimes the bully is the victim that just blew up. Another challenge is determining if it is actually bullying or just an instance of poor judgment. Knowing what to do when an administrator is not present or available when an incident is reported. It’s a challenge building a curriculum to help address the issues in a proactive way; the major challenge is time to develop the curriculum.

The teacher, Ms. Brown shared what she views as challenges in regards to addressing cyberbullying.
The vagueness of the situation is a challenge. Actions can be interpreted in different ways. Some students do something as a joke and not to really hurt or bully another student. It is hard to get them to relate or understand that one act can have multiple meanings...Not having a concrete definition of what cyberbullying really is [is a challenge].

Ms. Brown discussed the challenge of students being relocated after a cyberbully incident.

The cyberbully talks about the incident openly. The challenge is trying to end the cyberbullying in the room the student left and helping the cyberbully understand it’s inappropriate to talk about the student that left.

The themes Consistent Procedures When Addressing Cyberbullying; Counselors Key People; Teachers are the Frontline; and Challenges emerged alongside the lenses of social learning and social justice. Social Learning Theory suggests people learn from one another by modeling, observation, and imitation (Bandura, 1977). One’s environment can have an impact on one’s behavior and vice versa (Bandura, 1977). Social justice theory, at its most basic core, states that each person has equal rights to basic liberties compatible with the liberties of others (Kay, 1997). The conception of Rawls’ theory is of the thought of a “social contract, whereby people freely enter into an agreement to follow certain rules for the betterment of everyone, without considering the implications of these rules for their own selfish gain” (Robinson, 2016 p.1; Rawls, 2003). The data collected from interviews, focus group, and document analysis all evidenced aspects of these theories at their basic core.

Sub-Research Question 2

What procedures are in place to address cyberbullying in schools? Findings of sub-research question 2 are grouped by 3 emerging themes: (a) Address Incidents
Immediately; (b) Be Proactive: Students Are Taught Netiquette and (c) Loving School Culture. The aforementioned themes were significant throughout each phase of data collection and were common in participants’ discussion of the procedures in place to address cyberbullying at XYZ Technology Middle School. The findings for this question include excerpts taken from the raw data taken from interviews with the principal, assistant principal, counselors and teacher focus groups. Some excerpts from the data analysis is also included as information in the documents provide evidence of the emerging themes. However, documents will not be cited as a means to maintain anonymity of XYZ Technology Middle School and the XYZ School District.

Address Incidents Immediately. All participants spoke about the necessity of taking immediate action when incidents of cyberbullying are reported. Students have several ways in which they can report incidents. Students have an option to tell an adult in the building such as a teacher, a counselor, principal, or other support staff; and students can tell a parent and the parent can notify the school. Students also have an opportunity to utilize the anonymous tip line. Once an incident is reported, action is taken right away. The need to take immediate action stems from all educators at the school being aware that inappropriate use of technology, including cyberbullying, can easily happen among XYZ Technology Middle School students due to the daily use of technology by students. Additionally, the participants are aware that cyberbully issues can escalate if they take a “do nothing” approach. The principal and assistant principal agree that addressing reported incidents of cyberbullying are at the top of their priority list and they make that priority known to the students, parents, teachers, counselors, and
other staff in the building. Mrs. Hart stated that the school takes a “drop everything” approach when it comes to addressing cyberbullying. This was evident when the interview between the researcher and the counselor, Mrs. Hart, was delayed because Mrs. Hart was meeting with two students who reported a cyberbullying incident just before the researcher arrived for the interview. The interview was further delayed as Ms. Hart went to speak to the assistant principal about what was reported. It is evident that the school has a standard procedure for addressing cyberbullying incidents because all participants provided the same details about the procedure. According to participants, once a cyberbullying incident is reported to an adult, the incident is reported to the principal or assistant principal. Then, a meeting is scheduled with the students involved to obtain background information on the incident. The principal or assistant principal starts and investigation using the school developed investigation form. Students involved in the cyberbullying incident are also referred to the counseling department. If the reported incident is in fact cyberbullying, parents of the students involved are notified. Further action is taken to make the victim feel safe, including providing additional counseling services, while disciplinary consequences are issued to the cyberbully based on the consequences outlined in the district code of conduct cyberbullying and students discipline policy. The cyberbully is also referred for additional counseling services as a means to prevent the behavior from happening again.

Be Proactive: Students are taught Netiquette. All participants discussed how XYZ Technology Middle School is proactive in regards to addressing cyberbullying at the school. All students and parents are given the school’s student handbook and the district
Student Code of Conduct. These documents outline the expectations for behavior and the consequences for violating behavior expectations. Sharing these documents with students and parents is a proactive approach because they are told upfront what is expected behavior wise, and what can happen if inappropriate behaviors, such as cyberbullying, occur. All of the participants spoke about the training students receive throughout the school year on “Netiquette.” Merriam-Webster.com (online dictionary) defines Netiquette as “rules about the proper and polite way to communicate with other people when you are using the Internet.” The assistant principal, Dr. Andrews, stated that students are “taught to be good digital citizens.” The principal, Dr. Paul, discussed netiquette as it related to the technology onboarding process for 6th graders new to the school as a proactive measure to prevent cyberbullying.

There is an onboarding, especially with our 6th grade students teaching them again explicitly about how to provide commentary, how to give feedback, um, what good manners look like online; how they can effectively, positively communicate. I think there is a lot of opportunity for students to um, have that communication modeled from the teachers; we firmly believe in mutual respect. So, we give what we receive. In that context or framework, so through different learning management systems teachers can moderate that discussion through systems and provide different ways they provide feedback to students…They are modeling so if something comes up, the comment isn’t necessarily deleted, it becomes a teaching point. The teacher can use the comment to say, if you’re going to comment about someone’s work, what are some positive things we can say? There are some sentence stems in 6th grade. What are some sentence stems you can use as an introduction to comment on someone’s work? That is very academic, but it can carry-over into how students interact socially.

Dr. Andrews provided further insight into being proactive and reminding students about expectations for good manners and being good digital citizens.

One of the things I know from the first year we started the school is that we came up with this policy about being a good digital citizen and what that means. So as the principal stated it is a part of the on boarding process we do in subsequent
ways. In 7th and 8th [grades] we revisit those at the beginning of the school year. We remind about those expectations once again and in addition to that we find it necessary that after the winter break and at the beginning of the semester to have reminders. We try to make sure students are aware of what we expect for the remainder of the school year.

The counseling staff at XYZ Technology Middle School is proactive by providing classroom guidance to include topics such as cyberbullying, netiquette, and conflict resolution. The counselors also invite guess speakers to visit the school and speak to students about the dangers and consequences of cyberbullying outside of school. At the beginning of the school year, the counseling department administers a CyberSmart survey to all students at the school. The results of the survey help the counselors and administrators know if the school has cyberbullying incidents that are not being reported. The counselors use the results of the survey to teach lessons about character traits and the use of technology. Counselor, Mrs. Hart, hosted a Net Safety night to address a rise in cyberbullying at the school. Students, parents, and community members were invited to the event.

The teachers discussed additional proactive measures the school uses to address cyberbullying. Ms. Brown spoke about the technology awareness forum that the school hosts to educate students on netiquette. During this forum, students are taught that their school issued device is a learning tool and that they should not say anything on the device that they would not say face to face. The teachers also shared that the school has monitoring software on the school issued devices, so students cannot download social media apps on the devices.
Loving School Culture. The daily use of technology by all is not the only unique component of the schools culture. The school culture at XYZ Technology Middle School is one based on love for people, trust, honesty, and respect for everyone in the building. This theme was evident in the student handbook and from responses from the participants. The researcher also observed how kind and courteous the students, teachers, counselors, principals, and staff were to one another. Dr. Paul stated that there is “so much emphasis put on relationship building” at the school. There is a culture of kindness at the school. Ms. Olson responded, “students feel out of place when they aren’t kind.” Everyone cares about the best interest of others. Openness is also a part of the culture. Ms. Smith stated, “Snitching is a part of the culture.” Students feel comfortable talking to the adults in the building about things that are going on.

The themes, Address Incidents Immediately; Be Proactive: Students Are Taught Netiquette; and Loving School Culture also emerged alongside the lenses of social learning and social justice. Social Learning Theory suggests individuals learn from observing the people around them who behave in a certain way (Bandura, 1977). One’s environment can have an impact on one’s behavior and vice versa (Bandura, 1977). The conception of Rawls’ theory is of the thought of a “social contract, whereby people freely enter into an agreement to follow certain rules for the betterment of everyone, without considering the implications of these rules for their own selfish gain” (Robinson, 2016 p. 1). People are willing to honor the agreement and support and follow the rules when they feel the conditions are fair (Robinson, 2016; Rawls, 2003). The data collected from interviews, focus group, and document analysis all evidenced aspects of these theories.
Sub-Research Question 3

What policies are in place to discipline cyberbullies? Findings of sub-research question 3 identified one emerging theme. That theme Discipline for the Cyberbully is Incremental and Progressive.

Discipline for the Cyberbully is Incremental and Progressive. The principal’s statement that discipline is incremental and progressive was echoed throughout the data among all participants and the information presented by the document analysis. The principal, assistant principal, counselors, and teachers all stated that the cyberbullying and students discipline policies written in the XYZ School District’s Student Code of Conduct are the policies used to discipline cyberbullies for their actions. Dr. Paul states that these policies are used because “the expectations and consequences are laid out.” The Cyberbullying and Student Discipline policies are very clear and easy to understand. The Student Code of Conduct clearly states behavior expectations and the consequences for violating the expectations. The consequences in the Student Code of Conduct are incremental and progressive as there is a discipline chart that provides a breakdown of the level of the violation aligned to the consequence level. The consequences range from contacting parents and suspension to more severe punishment such as expulsion and criminal prosecution. The policies also outline the course of action for students’ first offense up to a third offense. The cyberbullying policy provides a clear definition as to what is considered cyberbullying in the XYZ School District. The definition is consistent with the cyberbullying definitions presented in the literature review for this study. Although it is not a part of the district’s written policy, the principal, assistant principal,
and teachers will use the ticket system as outlined in the school’s student handbook or allow students the opportunity to self-correct when a cyber incident is inappropriate, but is not deemed actual cyberbullying.

The theme Discipline for the Cyberbully is Incremental and Progressive emerged alongside the lens of John Rawls’ Social Justice Theory. Robinson’s (2016) research on Rawls’ Social Justice Theory finds that Rawls’ principles of justice as fairness happens in four stages. (1) “adoption of the principles of justice to regulate a society” (Robinson, 2016 p.2; Rawls, 2003); (2) is setting forth the process of governance; (3) is where laws are enacted (Robinson, 2016; Rawls, 2003) and (4) is “the application of the rules by administrators, the interpretation of the constitution and laws by the judiciary, and the following of the rules by members of the society in the conditions required by justice as fairness” (Robinson, 2016 p.2; Rawls, 2003). People are willing to honor the agreement and support and follow the rules when they feel the conditions are fair (Robinson, 2016; Rawls, 2003). The data collected from interviews, focus group, and document analysis all evidenced aspects of the aforementioned components included in social justice.

Sub-Research Question 4

What procedures are used to protect victims? Findings of sub-research question 4 identified one emerging theme. That theme is Protect the Victim.

Protect the Victim. According to research presented in chapter 2 of this study, the victim in cyberbullying incidents is fragile. The principal, assistant principal, counselors, and teachers all agree that protecting the victim is top priority. The principal and assistant principal protects the victim by taking immediate action to give the victim a sense of
safety, not sharing names of the parties involved (maintaining confidentiality), relying on the information surrounding the current incident only, contacting parents, and telling the cyberbully to stop the action immediately. Counselors at XYZ Technology Middle School protect the victim by helping the victim feel safe; maintaining the victim’s confidentiality; not allowing the victim and cyberbully to be in close proximity of each other which may include changing the victim’s class schedule; contact parents; and providing counseling resources such as coping skills and referring the students for “outside help” if needed. Teachers protect the victim by getting the student in contact with the school counselor; assure the victim that the he/she is not responsible for what is happening and letting the victim know that what is happening isn’t ok; remind the victim that there are people in the building that care about them and are advocates for their safety and well-being. Ms. Smith added that she “squashes the gossip” surrounding incidents of cyberbullying. Mr. Sims reminds his students to be “tech wise.”

The theme Protect the Victim emerged alongside the lens of John Rawls’ Social Justice Theory. According to Rawls (2003), a component of social justice is people being treated equal and their basic human rights are respected and supported. The data collected from the focus group and interviews, all evidenced aspects of the aforementioned components included in social justice in which this theme emerged.

Summary

Effective policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at XYZ Technology Middle School in the southern United States is well documented. Being proactive to prevent the phenomenon, taking immediate action, and following clear and
precise policies and procedures are necessary to effectively address cyberbullying. Using Social Learning Theory and Social Justice Theory as the lenses, the researcher sought to explore policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at a technology based middle school in the southern United States. The purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States. The study sought to understand educators’ experience with addressing the problem. The study explored how educators discipline students for cyberbullying, the actions they take to protect students who are cyberbullied, and the actions they take to decrease or prevent cyberbullying in their schools. Further, the study explored the challenges educators face and the procedures they follow to address and prevent cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States.

The findings of the study are grouped by the sub-research questions and related themes. The findings were grouped by sub-research questions because the sub-questions formed the comprehensive results for the primary research question. There were nine themes that emerged from this research study. Four themes emerged for sub-research question 1 which are: (a) Consistent Procedures When Addressing Cyberbullying; (b) Counselors are Key People; (c) Teachers are the Frontline; and (d) Challenges. These themes emerged alongside the lenses of social learning and social justice. Three themes emerged from sub-research question 2. These themes, Address Incidents Immediately; Be Proactive: Students Are Taught Netiquette; and Loving School Culture also emerged alongside the lenses of social learning and social justice. Findings of sub-research
question 3 identified one emerging theme which is Discipline for the Cyberbully is Incremental and Progressive. This theme emerged alongside the lens of social justice. Findings of sub-research question 4 identified one emerging theme, Protect the Victim. This theme also emerged alongside the lens of social justice.

The findings from this chapter will be discussed in depth in chapter 5. Chapter 5 will include a summary of the research study, a discussion of the findings from chapter 4 connected to the literature and theoretical framework, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the research study. It also provides a discussion of the major findings connected to the literature review from chapter 2. This chapter will also include overall conclusions, implications for leadership, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

Cyberbullying is an increasing problem among middle and high school students (Patchin & Hinduja, 2016). Ongoing research conducted by Patchin and Hinduja (2016) reveal that each year, more and more students are becoming engaged in incidents of cyberbullying. According to the National Crime Prevention Association (2013), more than half of students in middle and high school have experienced cyberbullying as the bully, victim, or as a bystander. Students who are involved in cyberbullying incidents as victims, cyberbullies, or bystanders can sustain severe emotional and psychological wounds that last a lifetime (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). Cyberbullying incidents, such as mean text messages, threatening emails, and demeaning, hateful, or embarrassing social media post, often go unnoticed by adults, thus creating an environment for the behavior to continue to escalate due to the problem not being addressed quickly (Alvaraz, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Landau, 2013). However, students are less likely to participate in cyberbullying if they there is close monitoring and adult
supervision (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). Additionally, students are less likely to engage in acts of cyberbullying if they know educators and parents will issue serious consequences for the behavior because it is not tolerated (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013).

The purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States. The study sought to understand educators’ experience with addressing the problem. The study explored how educators discipline students for cyberbullying, the actions they take to protect students who are cyberbullied, and the actions they take to decrease or prevent cyberbullying in their schools. Further, the study explored the challenges educators face and the procedures they follow to address and prevent cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States. The researcher sought to answer the following research questions: Primary Question: What policies and procedures are in place to effectively address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school?

Sub-Questions:

1. What are educators’ experiences with addressing cyberbullying?
2. What procedures are in place to address cyberbullying in schools?
3. What policies are in place to discipline cyberbullies?
4. What procedures are used to protect victims?

Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and John Rawls’ Social Justice Theory served as a guide for this study.
The researcher conducted a qualitative study using a case study approach using Open-ended interview protocol, focus group, and document analysis of the district’s Student Code of Conduct, the school’s Student Handbook, Bullying Incident Investigation Forms, CyberSmart Survey Report, the district’s Policy on Bullying/Cyberbullying, and counselor’s presentations on Netiquette: Cyber Etiquette.

An open-ended interview protocol was used in personal interviews with the principal, assistant principal, counselors, and focus groups with teachers. The interview questions were in line with the research questions guided by the literature in chapter 2. The researcher transcribed responses from interviews and focus group. After the transcription process, an open coding process was used. The responses from interviews and the focus group were organized into 96 initial codes. The researcher reviewed codes to look for emerging themes, patterns, and concepts. The researcher grouped similar codes together. The grouped codes were reviewed again and 9 themes emerged. The themes include


Summary of Major Findings

The researcher identified nine themes. The Primary Research Question: What policies and procedures are in place to effectively address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school? is the overarching question that guided this study. All nine of the
themes support the response to this question. These themes were significant throughout each phase of the data collection process. Additionally, research question 1 shows the connection between the theoretical frameworks and the research findings. There were four sub-questions that were significant to this study that helped the researcher obtain more detailed information to better answer the primary research question. Each of the four sub-research questions were associated with specific themes. Therefore, data from the interviews, focus group, and data analysis will be discussed by the sub-research questions and related themes, all of which answers the primary research question.

Conclusions Related to Sub-Research Question 1

What are educators’ experiences with addressing cyberbullying? The findings of sub-research question 1 are grouped by 4 emerging themes: (a) Consistent Procedures When Addressing Cyberbullying; (b) Counselors are Key People; (c) Teachers are the Frontline; and (d) Challenges. The first emerging theme Consistent Procedures When Addressing Cyberbullying appeared frequently in each interview and the focus group. Participants revealed that their experiences with addressing cyberbullying at XYZ Technology Middle School were unique, but the commonality is that their procedures are consistent when they address cyberbullying at the school. All participants are familiar with the policies and procedures outlined in the district Student Code of Conduct to address student discipline including cyberbullying. All participants stated that the principal and assistant principal conducts the investigations for cyberbullying incidents. The second theme Counselors are Key People was articulated by all study participants. Students involved in cyberbullying incidents are always referred to the counselors for
support. The counselors also play a vital role in combating cyberbullying. The third theme Teachers are the Frontline was prevalent among the principals, counselors, and teachers. Teachers are the closest to the students because they are in class with them each day; therefore teachers are usually the first to experience addressing the incidents of cyberbullying. The fourth theme Challenges represented the overall complexity of the phenomenon itself. The main challenges include “there is no silver bullet to combat the issue,” meaning there is no one size fit all solution to combating or addressing cyberbullying determining if the reported incident is actually cyberbullying and not just a moment of poor judgment on the students part, technology is growing fast and students are finding apps to hide cyberbullying, and it is often hard to tell who is actually the victim and who is the cyberbully.

Conclusions Related to Sub-Research Question 2

What procedures are in place to address cyberbullying in schools? The findings of sub-research question 2 are grouped by 3 emerging themes: (a) Address Incidents Immediately; (b) Be Proactive: Students Are Taught Netiquette and (c) Loving School Culture. The first theme under question 2 Address Incidents Immediately appears frequently. All participants spoke about the necessity of taking immediate action when incidents of cyberbullying are reported. Students have several ways in which they can report incidents. Once an incident is reported, action is taken right away. The participants are aware that cyberbully issues can escalate if they take a “do nothing” approach. The principal and assistant principal agree that addressing reported incidents of cyberbullying are at the top of their priority list and they make that priority known to the students,
parents, teachers, counselors, and other staff in the building. The second theme, Be Proactive: Students are taught Netiquette appears frequently. All participants discussed how the school is proactive in regards to addressing cyberbullying at the school. All students and parents are given the school’s student handbook and the district Student Code of Conduct. All of the participants spoke about the training students receive throughout the school year on “Netiquette.” Students are “taught to be good digital citizens.” The counseling staff is proactive by providing classroom guidance to include topics such as cyberbullying, netiquette, and conflict resolution. The school has monitoring software on the school issued devices, so students cannot download social media apps on the devices. The third theme Loving School Culture, was a common response among participants. The daily use of technology by all is not the only unique component of the schools culture. The school culture is one based on love for people, trust, honesty, and respect for everyone in the building.

Conclusions Related to Sub-Research Question 3

What policies are in place to discipline cyberbullies? Findings of sub-research question 3 identified one emerging theme. That theme Discipline for the Cyberbully is Incremental and Progressive. The principal’s statement that “discipline is incremental and progressive” was echoed throughout the data among all participants and the information presented by the document analysis. The principal, assistant principal, counselors, and teachers all stated that the cyberbullying and students discipline policies written in the district’s Student Code of Conduct are the policies used to discipline cyberbullies for their actions. These policies are used because “the expectations and consequences are
laid out.” The Student Code of Conduct clearly states behavior expectations and the consequences for violating the expectations. The consequences in the Student Code of Conduct are incremental and progressive as there is a discipline chart that provide a breakdown of the level of the violation aligned to the consequence level.

Conclusions Related Sub-Research Question 4

What procedures are used to protect victims? Findings of sub-research question 4 identified one emerging theme. That theme is Protect the Victim. The principal, assistant principal, counselors, and teachers all agree that protecting the victim is top priority. Victims are protected by educators taking immediate action to give the victim a sense of safety, not sharing names of the parties involved (maintaining confidentiality), relying on the information surrounding the current incident only, contacting parents, and telling the cyberbully to stop the action immediately. Students are also referred to counselors for support.

Discussion of Findings

In this case study, data were obtained from participants whose role in the school helped the researcher gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The study participants included the principal, the assistant principal, counselors, and teachers. Using Social Learning Theory and Social Justice Theory as the theoretical frameworks, the researcher gathered data in effort to gain an in-depth understanding of policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States. The researcher sought to understand educators’ experience with addressing the problem. The study explored how educators discipline
students for cyberbullying, the actions they take to protect students who are cyberbullied, and the actions they take to decrease or prevent cyberbullying in their schools. Further, the study explored the challenges educators face and the procedures they follow to address and prevent cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States. The findings from this qualitative case study support several declarations from the literature review of chapter 2. The findings also provide additional context to much of what has been presented in the literature review. In this section, the major findings will be discussed in relation to the data reported in the literature review. The discussion of the findings that follows addresses the research questions and their corresponding themes.

The Primary Research Question: Policies and Procedures

The primary research question was what policies and procedures are in place to effectively address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school? The primary research question addressed the overall focus of the policies and procedures educators at the school use to effectively address cyberbullying at the technology based middle school. This overarching question will be answered in detail by the findings and discussion of the 4 sub-research questions and their corresponding themes.

Sub-Research Question 1: Educators’ Experience

The first sub-research question was what are educators’ experiences with addressing cyberbullying? Four themes emerged from this question. The themes are discussed below.
Consistent Procedures When Addressing Cyberbullying. Sub-research question 1 focused on educators’ experience with addressing cyberbullying at a technology based middle school. All of the educators, who participated in this study, had an experience with addressing cyberbullying. This finding is supported by literature that states cyberbullying appears to be most prevalent in junior high school, among students in grades 7-10 (Tokunaga, 2010; Li, 2006; Morrison, 2009). Additionally, teens who use technology are more likely to be involved in incidents of cyberbullying as a victim, bully, or both; or as a bystander (Aftab, 2014; Bullyingstatistics.org, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Li, 2006; National Crime Prevention Council, 2014). The technology based nature of the school and the grade levels of the students enrolled make this school and ideal setting for cyberbullying to take place based on the literature.

Educators at this school use consistent procedures when addressing cyberbullying at the school. Those procedures include following the school district’s Student Code of Conduct. Additionally, teachers report incidents to the principal and assistant principal. The principal and assistant principal conduct cyberbullying investigations. Parents are contacted and students involved in cyberbullying incidents are referred to school counselors for support. Consequences for cyberbullying incidents are issued as necessary based on the guidelines outlined in the district’s Student Code of Conduct. Based on the literature, educators have a responsibility to prevent, intervene, and stop cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). In regards to intervention, educators should thoroughly investigate any reported or suspected incidents of cyberbullying, identify the parties involved, collect evidence and data, and collaborate with parents to communicate to
students that cyberbullying is a serious offense and it will not be tolerated or dismissed (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Counselors are Key People. The second theme that emerged in regards to sub-research question 1 is counselors are key people when addressing cyberbullying. Students, teachers, and administrators at the research site value the services provided by the counseling department and the support the counselors give when addressing cyberbullying. The principal, assistant principal, and all of the teachers from the focus group emphasized how much they refer students to the counselors when they become aware of cyberbullying or potential cyberbullying incidents. The counselors work with students on proper use of technology. They administer cybersmart surveys and use the data to develop lesson to prevent and decrease cyberbullying incidents at the school. Additionally, counselors are key in providing care and support to cyberbully victims. According to the literature, educators should work to establish a positive school climate and promote awareness regarding appropriate internet usage to prevent cyberbullying, (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Levy, 2011).

Teachers are the Frontline. Teachers are the front line is the third theme that emerged in regards to sub-research question 1. This theme was prevalent among the principals, counselors, and teachers. Teachers are the closest to the students on a day to day basis. Students practically spend their entire school day with a teacher. For that reason, teachers are usually the first to experience addressing the issue of cyberbullying. The literature states that educators have a responsibility to prevent, intervene, and stop cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014).
Challenges. The fourth theme that emerged in regards to sub-research question 1 is challenges. All respondents spoke about the different challenges they encounter in regards to addressing cyberbullying. This theme is represented by the overall complexity of the phenomenon itself. Some of the challenges faced are “there is no silver bullet to combat the issue,” meaning there is no one size fit all solution to combating or addressing cyberbullying; there are limits to what educators can do when incidents occur students’ on personal devices; technology changes so fast; addressing the cyberbullying incidents that take place away from school; knowing who the actual victim is; students not reporting incidents in a timely manner; building a curriculum to address the issue in a proactive way; and not having a concrete definition of cyberbullying. The literature supports many of these findings in regards to challenges educators face. A major challenge for educators is cyberbullying is a rapidly growing problem among middle and high school students that is having a substantial impact on students and the school setting (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Newey & Magson, 2010). The literature states that challenges for educators in having an effective role in intervention and stopping cyberbullying are many. Many times educators are unsure how or if they have the authority to intervene, especially when the cyberbullying occurs off of school grounds and does not directly interrupt the learning environment (Mason, 2008); the school cannot issue consequences to a cyberbully if the incident occurs away from the school, if school property was not used to commit cyberbullying, or if the learning environment is not directly interrupted (Stoel, 2011). Further, it is difficult for educators to intervene or stop cyberbullying if it is not reported or if students do not cooperate during investigations. According to
research, “schools have a mandated responsibility to give students a quality education” (Stoel, 2011 p. 5), but this is challenging when students learning is affected by cyberbullying (Stoel, 2011; Bhat, 2008).

Sub-Research Question 2: Procedures to Address Cyberbullying

The second sub-research question was what procedures are in place to address cyberbullying in schools? Three themes emerged from this question. The themes are discussed below.

Address Incidents Immediately. This is the first theme in relation to answering sub-research question 2. All participants spoke about the procedure of taking immediate action when incidents of cyberbullying are reported. Students have several ways in which they can report incidents such as telling an adult or utilizing the school’s anonymous tip line. Once an incident is reported, action is taken right away. The participants are aware that cyberbully issues can escalate if they take a “do nothing” approach. At this school, once a cyberbullying incident is reported to an adult, the incident is reported to the principal or assistant principal. Then, a meeting is scheduled with the students involved to obtain background information on the incident. The principal or assistant principal starts and investigation using the school developed investigation form. Students involved in the cyberbullying incident are also referred to the counseling department. If the reported incident is in fact cyberbullying, parents of the students involved are notified. Further action is taken to make the victim feel safe, including providing additional counseling services, while disciplinary consequences are issued to the cyberbully based
on the consequences outlined in the district code of conduct cyberbullying and students discipline policy.

The procedures followed by the school to take immediate action is aligned to what the literature in chapter 2 suggests. This literature says, to intervene, educators should thoroughly investigate any reported or suspected incidents of cyberbullying, identify the parties involved, collect evidence and data, and collaborate with parents to communicate to students that cyberbullying is a serious offense and it will not be tolerated or dismissed (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Further, research states it is also important for educators to establish a safe or anonymous reporting system and taking action when cyberbullying is reported, which is practiced by the research site. Educators must stop cyberbullying by intervening, protecting victims, and issuing appropriate consequences to cyberbullies (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Stoel, 2011; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Be Proactive: Students are taught Netiquette. This is the second theme in relation to answering sub-research question 2. The literature supports the school’s proactive approach to addressing cyberbullying. Hinduja & Patchin (2015) suggests that educators should be trained on cyberbullying and cyberbullying education should be integrated into the school’s curriculum and culture (Levy, 2011). The school is proactive in regards to addressing cyberbullying. All students and parents are given the school’s student handbook and the district Student Code of Conduct. These documents outline the expectations for behavior and the consequences for violating behavior expectations. Students receive training throughout the school year on “Netiquette: rules about the
proper and polite way to communicate with other people when you are using the Internet.” Students at this school are taught how to be “good digital citizens.” Other proactive procedures include counselors provide classroom guidance to include topics such as cyberbullying, netiquette, and conflict resolution; and the school has monitoring software on the school issued devices, so students cannot download social media apps on the devices.

Loving School Culture. This is the third theme in relation to answering sub-research question 2. To prevent cyberbullying, educators should work to establish a positive school climate and promote awareness regarding appropriate internet usage (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Levy, 2011). The daily use of technology by all in the building is a unique component of the schools culture. The love for people, trust, honesty, and respect for everyone in the building is another major component of this schools culture. The school is also known to have a culture of kindness. According to research conducted by Hinduja and Patchin (2015) regarding school climate, “students who report a positive climate at school also experience fewer problematic behaviors online” (p.1). This school’s culture also avails itself to students being comfortable “snitching” or telling an adult when there is an issue such as cyberbullying.

Sub-Research Question 3: Policies to Discipline Cyberbullies

The third sub-research question was what policies are in place to discipline cyberbullies? Only one theme emerged from this question. The theme is discussed below.
Discipline for the Cyberbully is Incremental and Progressive. This is the only theme in relation to answering sub-research question 3. Findings reveal that the school has definitive policies in place to discipline cyberbullies. Discipline for the cyberbully is incremental and progressive based on the schools district’s cyberbullying and students discipline policies. These policies are very clear and easy to understand. The Student Code of Conduct clearly states behavior expectations and the consequences for violating the expectations. The consequences in the Student Code of Conduct are incremental and progressive as there is a discipline chart that provide a breakdown of the level of the violation aligned to the consequence level. The consequences range from contacting parents and suspension to more severe punishment such as expulsion and criminal prosecution. The policies also outline the course of action for students’ first offense up to a third offense. The school does well to discipline the cyberbully while also being fair and supportive. Research shows that cyberbullies experience negative effects as well. According to Cowie (2013), cyberbullies are more likely to abuse alcohol and develop substance dependency. Additionally, cyberbullies are also at risk of depression, anxiety, and suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Cowie, 2013; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). Like victims, cyberbullies also tend to suffer academically, have an increase in delinquent behavior including school violence (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Cowie, 2013; Mason, 2008), and feel psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches (Cowie, 2013). Further, cyberbullies are at risk of other negative consequences such suspension from school, facing legal charges. At this school, students who cyberbully are also referred to counselors for support services, which is important.
The policies in place to discipline the cyberbully is aligned with the component below for social justice theory. Robinson’s (2016) research on Rawls’ Social Justice Theory finds that Rawls’ principles of justice as fairness happens in four stages. (1) “adoption of the principles of justice to regulate a society” (Robinson, 2016 p.2; Rawls, 2003); (2) is setting forth the process of governance; (3) is where laws are enacted (Robinson, 2016; Rawls, 2003) and (4) is “the application of the rules by administrators, the interpretation of the constitution and laws by the judiciary, and the following of the rules by members of the society in the conditions required by justice as fairness” (Robinson, 2016 p.2; Rawls, 2003). People are willing to honor the agreement and support and follow the rules when they feel the conditions are fair (Robinson, 2016; Rawls, 2003). School officials and other educators have an obligation to discipline bullies and protect victims in order to maintain a safe and secure learning environment for all within the educational setting (Broster & Brien, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Morrison, 2009).

Sub-Research Question 4: Procedures to Protect Victims

The fourth sub-research question was what procedures are used to protect victims? Only one theme emerged from this question. The theme is discussed below.

Protect the Victim. This is the only theme in relation to answering sub-research question 4. Findings revealed that the principal, assistant principal, counselors, and teachers are adamant about protecting victims of cyberbullying and for good cause. Cyberbully victims tend to experience social isolation, loneliness, and social withdrawal which leads to depression, anger, anxiety, low self-esteem, and in extreme cases suicide.
(Bullying Statistics, 2016; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Cowie, 2013; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010; Mason, 2008). In studies conducted by Hinduja & Patchin (2014) and Cowie (2013), cyberbullied victims reported feeling psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, insomnia, abdominal pain, and nausea. Further, victims are very likely to experience a drop in academic achievement, an increase in school absenteeism, and an increase in delinquent behavior including school violence (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Cowie, 2013; Mason, 2008).

To decrease some of the potential negative effects caused by cyberbullying, the principal, assistant principal, counselors, and teachers, at this school, follow specific procedures to protect cyberbully victims. The principal and assistant principal protect the victim by taking immediate action to give the victim a sense of safety, not sharing names of the parties involved (maintaining confidentiality), relying on the information surrounding the current incident only, contacting parents, and telling the cyberbully to stop the action immediately. Counselors at XYZ Technology Middle School protect the victim by helping the victim feel safe; maintaining the victims confidentiality; not allowing the victim and cyberbully to be in close proximity of each which may include changing the victims class schedule; contact parents; and providing counseling resources such as coping skills and referring the students for “outside help” if needed. Teachers protect the victim by getting the student in contact with the school counselor; assure the victim that the he/she is not responsible for what is happening and letting the victim know that what is happening isn’t ok; remind the victim that there are people in the building that care about them and are advocates for their safety and well-being.
According to Rawls (2003), a component of social justice is people being treated equal and their basic human rights are respected and supported.

The educators at this school is fair and just to student victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying by doing everything in their power to support and be fair to all parties involved in incidents of cyberbullying.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of policies and procedures used to effectively address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States. The study sought to understand educators’ experience with addressing the problem. The study explored how educators discipline students for cyberbullying, the actions they take to protect students who are cyberbullied, and the actions they take to decrease or prevent cyberbullying in their schools. Further, the study explored the challenges educators face and the procedures they follow to address and prevent cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school in the southern United States. This study focused on the growing incidents of technology used to victimize students by examining educators’ experiences with peer-on-peer cyberbullying and policies and procedures used to mitigate against it. The findings of this study further develop the link between, social learning theory, social justice theory, cyberbullying, and connect it to the work of leaders in the field of education. Research findings presented in chapter 4 and discussed in the previous section are the basis for which the following conclusions are drawn.
Findings from this study reveal that cyberbullying is still a rapidly growing issue among students in the middle school setting. The potential for cyberbullying incidents grow when daily use of technology for instruction is coupled with students in grades 6-8. For this reason, principals, teachers, and counselors must be vigilant in regards to monitoring technology use, training students on the proper use of technology, and taking proactive measures to combat the issue of cyberbullying.

This study found that addressing incidents immediately; being proactive by teaching students netiquette; being aware of challenges; using consistent procedures when addressing cyberbullying; understanding counselors are key people when addressing cyberbullying; ensuring the discipline policy for the cyberbully is incremental and progressive; protecting the victim; creating a positive and loving school culture; and supporting teachers on the frontline are key components of effectively addressing cyberbullying.

Findings from this study revealed that clearly defined and clearly communicated policies and procedures are necessary to effectively address cyberbullying at a technology based middle school. Those policies and procedures must be communicated and understood by all stakeholders to include, educators, students, and parents. It is important to clearly communicate and define behavior expectations and consequences for violating those expectations those who may be affected. Through the lens of Social Justice Theory, educators must balance disciplining the cyberbully and protecting the victim in ways that are fair to both and preventing the issue to escalate any further

Implications

This study will help educators and other stakeholders gain an understanding of cyberbullying. It will also bring awareness to the benefits of addressing the problem as soon as it is reported or avoiding the problem altogether. Further, this study will bring awareness about how understanding the problem factors into how the problem is addressed at the school level. The research may provide educators with effective strategies on how to intervene when cyber bullying is reported and how to issue consequences to cyberbullies while also protecting victims. This study will also provide educators and other stakeholders with information to increase their knowledge about cyberbullying, which can lead to the development of anti-bullying programs and policies. Additionally, the study will introduce practices employed by other educators who effectively addressed cyberbullying (Broster & Brien, 2010).

The results of this study will benefit students because educators may be able to use this information to implement anti-cyberbullying programs to raise awareness about the problem and decrease the number of students being cyber bullied. Students involved in cyberbullying incidents may learn that educators take this matter seriously and that this behavior will not be tolerated in schools. Parents can use the information to gain knowledge about what cyberbullying is and how the issue can be addressed in schools.

The results will help teachers by providing information about what cyber bullying is and how school leaders can address the issue. Teachers can assist with implementation
of anti-bullying programs, which can improve their classroom learning environments. Teachers may be introduced to new strategies about how to intervene when students report an incidence of cyberbullying. The increased awareness may reduce cyberbullying in schools.

This study can help policy makers by making them aware of the challenges educators encounter when addressing cyberbullying from a policy, or lack thereof, standpoint. The results can be used to provide information necessary for policy makers to create policies and laws that will allow educators to discipline students for a phenomenon that starts beyond school grounds, but have an impact on the school environment. The information can be used to develop policies that would give principals and teachers the power required to intervene, discipline cyberbullies, and protect victims when incidences of cyberbullying are reported.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current qualitative case study was conducted at a technology based middle school in the southern United States. The researcher believes that additional research studies, using the methodology of the current study, should be done to explore the policies and procedures used to effectively address cyberbullying at other education levels such as elementary, high, or college or schools that do not have a technology focus. This will allow the researcher to see if the policies and procedures that were effective at this site will be effective at other levels.

The second recommendation would be to conduct a qualitative case study to explore the parents and students’ perception regarding cyberbullying and how it is
addressed at a school. This study will provide further insight into the effectiveness of the policies and procedures from a victim/cyberbully point of view. This study will also provide a more holistic view into how cyberbullying is addressed.

A third recommendation for future research is to conduct a multiple case study to allow the researcher to explore the policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying at multiple sites. This type of study would allow the researcher to examine the differences and commonalities among the sites. Studying multiple sites may provide richer findings that may add the existing body of knowledge related to the phenomenon and how it is addressed.

Summary

This qualitative case study explored the policies and procedures used to effectively address cyberbullying at a technology based middle school. Chapter 5 provided a summary of the research study, a discussion of the major findings that connected to the literature review from chapter 2, conclusions, implications for leadership, and recommendations for future research studies. The findings of the study are grouped by the sub-research questions and related themes. The findings revealed nine themes and those themes were addressed with the research questions. Four themes emerged for sub-research question 1 which are: (a) Consistent Procedures When Addressing Cyberbullying; (b) Counselors are Key People; (c) Teachers are the Frontline; and (d) Challenges. These themes emerged alongside the lenses of social learning and social justice. Three themes emerged from sub-research question 2. These themes, Address Incidents Immediately; Be Proactive: Students Are Taught Netiquette;
and Loving School Culture also emerged alongside the lenses of social learning and social justice. Findings of sub-research question 3 identified one emerging theme which is Discipline for the Cyberbully is Incremental and Progressive. This theme emerged alongside the lens of social justice. Findings of sub-research question 4 identified one emerging theme, Protect the Victim. This theme also emerged alongside the lens of social justice. The policies and procedures used by the school were aligned to the current research about cyberbullying and how the phenomenon should be addressed by educators. The researcher recommended future research to include exploring the policies and procedures at different education levels, from the perceptions of parents and students, or among multiple cases.
REFERENCES


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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

MERCER UNIVERSITY APPROVAL IRB
Thursday, March 30, 2017

Ms. Bettina L. Tate
3001 Mercer University Drive
Educational Leadership
Atlanta, GA 30341

RE: A Case Study of Policies and Procedures to Address Cyber-bullying at a Technology Based Middle School (HL703104)

Dear Ms. Tate:

On behalf of Mercer University's Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, your application submitted on 20-Mar-2017 for the above referenced protocol was reviewed in accordance with Federal Regulations 21 CFR 56.110(b) and 45 CFR 46.110(b) (for expedited review) and was approved under category(ies) B, 7 per 45 FR 60364.

Your application was approved for one year of study on 30-Mar-2017. The protocol expires on 29-Mar-2018. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Item(s) Approved:
The researcher proposes to conduct a qualitative study to gain an in-depth understanding of the policies and procedures used to address cyber-bullying in a technology-based middle school. The researcher will use single case study methodology to focus on one middle school. The principal, assistant principal, counselors, teachers, and other certified staff, employed by an urban school system in the southern United States will be invited to participate in this study. The study sample and participants will consist of educators at the selected school.

NOTE: Please report to the committee when the protocol is initiated. Report to the Committee immediately any changes in the protocol or consent form and all accidents, injuries, and serious or unexpected adverse events that occur to your subjects as a result of this study.

We at the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance are dedicated to providing the best service to our research community. As one of our investigators, we value your feedback and ask that you please take a moment to complete our Satisfaction Survey and help us to improve the quality of our service.

It has been a pleasure working with you and we wish you much success with your project! If you need any further assistance, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,

Ava Chambliss-Richardson, Ph.D., CIP, CIM
Associate Director of Human Research Protection Programs (HRPP)
Member
Institutional Review Board

"Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonization’s (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice."

Mercer University IRB & Office of Research Compliance
Phone: 478-301-4101 | Email: ORC Mercer@Mercer.edu | Fax: 478-301-2329
1501 Mercer University Drive, Macon, Georgia 31207-0001

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APPENDIX B

SCHOOL DISTRICT APPROVAL
January 24, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

Ms. Bettina Tate has requested and been granted permission to conduct research within the
in the following topic:
A Case Study of Educators’ Experiences with Cyberbullying

This permission has been granted by the office appointed by the Superintendent of schools to
review all requests for research to be conducted within the
School System. Ms. Tate has fulfilled the application requirements and provided the
documentation necessary to ensure that we understand the scope of research and the methods
used to collect and present findings.

All prospective researchers must note that district approval does not guarantee participation of
any site, program area, or individual. The school principal or program supervisor will make the
final determination on whether research activity may proceed at the site or program level.
Individual participants may decline to participate or discontinue participation at any time.

Should you have any questions regarding Ms. Bettina Tate research approval status, please feel
free to contact me at (912) 395-5735.

Thank you,

Kristy Collins Rylander

Office of Accountability, Assessment, & Reporting
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW INVITATION LETTER
Dear Middle School Educator,

I would like to invite you to take part in a personal interview to obtain your input on the policies and procedures to address cyberbullying at your technology-based middle school. The interview will take place between the dates of April 4, 2017, and April 20, 2017, at your school at a time scheduled by you. The interview should last no longer than one hour.

The interview will provide an opportunity for you to share your experiences with addressing cyberbullying at your school. In particular, I would like to know:
- Your experiences with addressing cyberbullying
- The procedures in place to address cyberbullying at your school
- The policies in place to discipline cyberbullies
- The procedures are used to protect victims of cyberbullying

The manner in which students bully has evolved over time from schoolyard fist fights and teasing to inflicting harm through words and images via technological means (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Li, 2005). According to the National Crime Prevention Association (2013), more than half of students in middle and high school have experienced cyberbullying as the bully, victim, or as a bystander. Bullying in any form can have major effects on students and the school environment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Cowie, 2013; Bullying Statistics, 2016). In studies conducted by Hinduja & Patchin (2014) and Cowie (2013), cyberbullied victims reported feeling psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, insomnia, abdominal pain, and nausea. Further, victims are very likely to experience a drop in academic achievement, an increase in school absenteeism, and an increase in delinquent behavior including school violence (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Cowie, 2013; Mason, 2008). Therefore, school officials need to be knowledgeable about how students use technology to bully so they can do more to address the issue and eliminate these behaviors in schools (Stewart, 2012).

Your views will help gather information to provide educators with knowledge about how students use technology to bullying and how educators can address cyberbullying in an effort to decrease or eliminate the issue in schools. Your participation in this study may help educators and other stakeholders gain an understanding of what cyberbullying is and the benefits of addressing the problem promptly.

If you would like to participate in an interview, please contact Bettina Polite Tate at 912-464-1228 or by email bettate1@gmail.com to schedule a date and time.

Best regards,

Bettina Polite Tate
Graduate Student and Doctoral Candidate
Mercer University
APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP INVITATION LETTER
Dear Middle School Educator,

I would like to invite you to take part in a focus group to obtain your input on the policies and procedures to address cyberbullying at your technology-based middle school. The focus group will take place on April 4, 2017, at 2:30 pm in the conference room. The focus group should last no longer than one hour.

The focus group will provide an opportunity for you to share your experiences with addressing cyberbullying at your school. In particular, I would like to know:

- Your experiences with addressing cyberbullying
- The procedures in place to address cyberbullying at your school
- The policies in place to discipline cyberbullies
- The procedures are used to protect victims of cyberbullying

The manner in which students bully has evolved over time from school yard fist fights and teasing to inflicting harm through words and images via technological means (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Li, 2005). According to the National Crime Prevention Association (2013), more than half of students in middle and high school have experienced cyberbullying as the bully, victim, or as a bystander. Bullying in any form can have major effects on students and the school environment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Cowie, 2013; Bullying Statistics, 2016). In studies conducted by Hinduja & Patchin (2014) and Cowie (2013), cyberbullied victims reported feeling psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, insomnia, abdominal pain, and nausea. Further, victims are very likely to experience a drop in academic achievement, an increase in school absenteeism, and an increase in delinquent behavior including school violence (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Cowie, 2013; Mason, 2008). Therefore, school officials need to be knowledgeable about how students use technology to bully so they can do more to address the issue and eliminate these behaviors in schools (Stewart, 2012).

Your views will help gather information to provide educators with knowledge about how students use technology to bullying and how educators can address cyberbullying in an effort to decrease or eliminate the issue in schools. Your participation in this study may help educators and other stakeholders gain an understanding of what cyberbullying is and the benefits of addressing the problem promptly.

If you would like to participate in the focus group on April 4, 2017, please contact Bettina Polite Tate at 912-484-1228 or by email bottate1@gmail.com.

Best regards,

Bettina Polite Tate
Graduate Student and Doctoral Candidate
Mercer University

3001 Mercer University Drive, Atlanta, GA 30544
www.mercer.edu
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS
Cyberbullying Case Study
Interview/Focus Group Questions

Research Question:
What policies and procedures are in place to effectively address cyberbullying at a technology-based middle school?

1. What are educators’ experiences with addressing cyberbullying?
2. What procedures are in place to address cyberbullying in schools?
3. Which strategies have been effective?
4. Which strategies have been ineffective?
5. What policies are in place to discipline cyberbullies?
6. Which policies have been effective?
7. Which policies have been ineffective?
8. What procedures are used to protect victims?
9. Which procedures have been effective?
10. Which procedures have been ineffective?
11. What challenges have you encountered in regards to addressing cyberbullying?
APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT
A CASE STUDY OF EDUCATORS’ EXPERIENCES WITH CYBERBULLYING

Informed Consent

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators

Bettina L. Polite Tate, B.S.A, MPS, Ed.S. Tift College of Education at Mercer University
3001 Mercer University Drive, Atlanta, GA 30341, 912-484-1228

Purpose of the Research

This research study is designed to gain an in-depth understanding of policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying in a technology-based middle school. The study will also seek to understand how educators’ experience with addressing the problem. The study will explore how educators discipline students for cyberbullying, the actions they take to protect students who are cyberbullied, and the actions they take to decrease or prevent cyberbullying in their schools. Further, the study will explore the challenges educators face and the procedures they follow to address and prevent cyberbullying in a technology-based middle school.

The data from this research will be used to help educators and other stakeholders gain an understanding of cyberbullying. It will also bring awareness to the dangers associated with cyberbullying and the possible benefits of addressing the problem as soon as it is reported or avoiding the problem altogether. The research will provide educators with information regarding effective policies and procedures used to address cyberbullying. Some of the information includes how to intervene when cyberbullying is reported and how to issue consequences to cyberbullies while also protecting victims. This study will also provide educators and other stakeholders with information to increase their knowledge about cyberbullying, which can lead to the development of anti-bullying programs and policies aimed to decrease or eliminate incidents of cyberbullying.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer 11 open ended questions that will take 45-60 minutes of your time. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be selected from a group of certificated staff at your school site. You will be invited to participate in a focus group (teachers) or an individual interview (principals, counselors, and media specialist).

Your participation will take approximately 45-60 minutes for 1 session.

Potential Risks or Discomforts

There are no foreseeable risks associated with the study. However, audio/video taping may be used to allow the researcher to record all responses for data analysis purposes only. By participating in this study, you agree to permit taping of your responses for data analysis only. All recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the final research study.

Rev. January 2017
Potential Benefits of the Research
This study will help educators and other stakeholders gain an understanding of cyberbullying. It will also bring awareness to the dangers of not addressing the problem quickly and the possible benefits of addressing the problem as soon as it is reported or avoiding the problem altogether. Further, this study will bring awareness about how understanding the problem factors into how the problem is addressed at the school level. The research may provide educators with effective policies and procedures regarding how to intervene when cyberbullying is reported and how to issue consequences to cyberbullies while also protecting victims. This study will also provide educators and other stakeholders with information to increase their knowledge about cyberbullying, which can lead to the development of anti-bullying programs and policies to decrease or eliminate cyberbullying among students. Additionally, the study will introduce practices employed by other educators who effectively addressed cyberbullying.

Confidentiality and Data Storage
All information obtained will be held in strict confidentiality and will only be released with your permission. The results of this study may be published but your information such as your name and other demographic information will not be revealed.

The researcher will utilize a voice recorder for focus groups and interviews. The purpose of the voice recorder is to record responses for data analysis purposes only. The voice recorder will be locked in a cabinet in the researcher’s office. All recordings will be erased at the conclusion of the research study.

Participation and Withdrawal
Your participation in this research study is voluntary. As a participant, you may refuse to participate at any time. To withdraw from the study please contact Bettina Politte Tate at via email at bptate1@gmail.com or by phone at 912-484-1228. You may also contact my faculty advisor Dr. Olivia Boggs via email at BOGGS_OM@mercer.edu or by phone 678-547-6631.

Questions about the Research
If you have any questions about the research, please speak with Bettina Politte Tate at via email at bptate1@gmail.com or by phone at 912-484-1228. You may also contact my faculty advisor Dr. Olivia Boggs via email at BOGGS_OM@mercer.edu or by phone 678-547-6631.

In Case of Injury
It is unlikely that participation in this project will result in harm to subjects. If an injury to a subject does occur, he or she may be seen at a local or regional medical facility. All expenses associated with care will be the responsibility of the participant and his/her insurance.

Incentives to Participate
There is no incentive to participate in this study.

Audio or Video Taping
The researcher will utilize a voice recorder for focus groups and interviews to record responses for data analysis only. By participating in this study, you agree to having your verbal responses recorded. Your name and other information will not be used or shared. The voice recorder will be locked in a cabinet in the researcher’s office. All recordings will be erased at the conclusion of the research study.
Reasons for Exclusion from this Study
Subjects who are not certified educators employed by the selected site are excluded from this study.

This project has been reviewed and approved by Mercer University’s IRB. If you believe there is any infringement upon your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Chair, at (478) 301-4101.

You have been given the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered to your satisfaction. Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this research study.

Research Participant Name (Print)  Name of Person Obtaining Consent (Print)

Research Participant Signature  Person Obtaining Consent Signature

Date  Date

 Mercer IRB Approval Date  03/30/2017
 Protocol Expiration Date  03/29/2018

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APPENDIX G

permissions
From: Patchin, Justin W. [mailto:PATCHINJ@UWEC.EDU]
Sent: Tuesday, June 20, 2017 3:16 PM
To: Bettina Tate <Bettina.Tate@sccpss.com>; bptate1@gmail.com
Cc: Olivia Boggs <BOGGS_OM@mercer.edu>
Subject: RE: Permission to Use Chart

Hello Bettina,

Thanks for your interest in our work. You are welcome to include our chart in your dissertation. Please just provide proper attribution. If you have any other questions, don’t hesitate to reach out.

All the best with your work.

Justin Patchin
--
Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D.
Co-director, Cyberbullying Research Center
Professor of Criminal Justice
Department of Political Science
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
105 Garfield Avenue
Eau Claire, WI 54702-4004
Ph: 715-836-4058
Twitter/IG: @justinpatchin
http://www.justinpatchin.com
http://www.cyberbullying.org/

From: Bettina Tate [mailto:Bettina.Tate@sccpss.com]
Sent: Thursday, June 15, 2017 3:11 PM
To: patchin@cyberbullying.org; hinduja@cyberbullying.org; bptate1@gmail.com
Cc: Olivia Boggs <BOGGS_OM@mercer.edu>
Subject: Permission to Use Chart
Importance: High

Good afternoon, Dr. Hinduja and Dr. Patchin.

I hope the day finds you well. I am a Ph.D. candidate at Mercer University in the state of Georgia. I am contacting you to obtain permission to use your “Lifetime Cyberbullying Victimization Rates” chart for 2007-2015 or 2007-2016. I wish to include the chart in my final dissertation “A Case Study of Policies and Procedures to Address Cyberbullying at a Technology Based Middle School.” I feel your chart will provide an meaningful visual to my paper.

Thank you in advance and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Respectfully,
Bettina Polite Tate