

CYBER BULLYING: A NEW FORM OF ADOLESCENT STUDENT AGGRESSION REQUIRING A
COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION, PREVENTION, AND INTERVENTION STRATEGY

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CYBER BULLYING: A NEW FORM OF ADOLESCENT STUDENT AGGRESSION REQUIRING A
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Scott Michael Adler

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Abstract

Cyber bullying is a newer form of repeated adolescent student aggression involving the submittal or posting of harassing, intimidating, or threatening texts, e-mails, images, and other electronic messages. Like traditional bullying, cyber bullying involves actual or perceived senses of power over another individual. Unlike traditional bullying, cyber bullying can be committed at any time from any location and offenders can hide their identities from their victims.

Research demonstrates that cyber bullying among adolescent students is a growing problem that can lead to behavioral, emotional, and psychological problems as well as suicide. Middle-school-based cyber bullying awareness and prevention programs educate adolescent students about cyber bullying and the adverse consequences associated with it. However, cyber bullying is a complex problem that cannot be effectively addressed in one or two class periods.

Therefore, a comprehensive effort by parents, educators, law enforcement, and other community resources is needed in order to proactively educate adolescent students about cyber bullying and to prevent its occurrence.

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I. Introduction

Overview of Bullying

Bullying is defined as an imbalance of power where a stronger person or group of persons repeatedly harasses or harms a weaker one over an extended period of time (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, and McWhirter, 2007). According to Willard (2007), direct or indirect traditional bullying consists of three types: physical, verbal, and relational. Physical bullying can range in severity from a simple shove to a closed-fist punch in the face. Verbal bullying involves name-calling, teasing, taunting, racial slurs, and other direct verbal threats. Relational bullying involves harming another person's relationship, reputation, or social status through gossip, rumors, or other forms of indirect aggression. Regardless of the types, bullying creates fear and hostility, which hinders abilities for all students to grow and prosper within the academic environment (Willard, 2007).

Over the past several years, many individuals, particularly parents and educators, have questioned why school violence has increased. According to a 2002 report by the U.S. Secret Service, bullying played a significant role in several school shootings nationwide (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013). Therefore, bullying prevention and intervention has become a significant priority in our nation's schools. In order to be effective, prevention and intervention plans must not only focus on bullies and victims; they must be educational for bystanders and all other students who can help reduce bullying through proactive reporting and support for victims (McWhirter, et al, 2007). Even though traditional bullying that normally occurs in classrooms, hallways, playgrounds, and other locations on middle school property

continues to be problematic, it is no longer the only form of adolescent student aggression causing concerns.

Statement of the Problem

Due to the continuous technological advancements of computers and cell phones, along with the evolution and growing use of social networking, over 90% of adolescent students have access to the Internet (Keith and Martin, 2005). Additionally, a survey performed by Pew Internet revealed that nearly half of adolescent students between the ages of 10 and 17 have cell phones with texting capabilities (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2012). Consequently, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report that cyber bullying, defined as a newer form of repeated aggression involving the submittal or posting of threatening or harassing texts, e-mails, images, and other derogatory electronic messages, has become a growing problem nationwide (Hertz and Ferdon, 2008). The adverse effects of cyber bullying mimic those of traditional bullying. Furthermore, cyber bullying serves as an even more problematic form of bullying because perpetrators can hide their identities; reducing or eliminating fears or concerns of being caught (Shariff, 2009).

The Protecting Children in the 21st Century Act of 2008 mandates that schools educate students about Internet safety, to include cyber bullying awareness and response (Kraft and Wang, 2009). A 2010 survey of schools found that teachers and other school administrators do not believe that their cyber-education programs are enough to prevent students from the perpetration and victimization of cyber bullying (National Computer Security Alliance, 2010). Most cyber bullying occurs after school hours and away from the educational environment (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009). Therefore, as this problem continues to grow, the overall

effectiveness of current cyber bullying education problems should be assessed and alternative prevention and intervention methods should be explored.

Purpose of the Study

This study will serve several purposes. First, it will differentiate cyber bullying from traditional bullying and identify and explain common forms of online aggression used by adolescent students. Second, it will reveal cyber bullying prevalence among adolescent students based on empirical evidence; discuss adverse effects and consequences of adolescent cyber bullying; and introduce efforts by state legislatures to enact laws designed to prevent cyber bullying and to sanction offenders. Third, the study will provide a theoretical framework to help explain why adolescent students engage in cyber bullying. Finally, it will introduce two middle-school-based cyber bullying education programs, assess their strengths and weaknesses, and make recommendations for a more comprehensive cyber bullying education, prevention, and intervention strategy involving parents, educators, law enforcement, and other community resources.

I. Literature Review

Traditional Bullying v. Cyber Bullying

In order to determine whether a relationship existed between traditional bullying and cyber bullying, Raskauskas and Stolz (2007) surveyed 84 students between the ages of 13 and 18 from one rural and one suburban high school in California. Study participants answered questions about the perpetration and victimization of both forms of bullying. A summarization of the results revealed that perpetration and victimization of traditional bullying was significantly predictive of cyber bullying perpetration and victimization (Raskauskas and Stolz,

2007). Another study performed by Hinduja and Patchin (2009) revealed that traditional bullies were nearly three times as likely to bully others online. Both studies demonstrate that a connection exists between traditional and cyber bullying. However, it is difficult to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between both forms.

Cyber bullying can be compared to traditional bullying in a number of ways. First, like traditional bullies, cyber bullies are aggressors who seek pleasure or profit through the mistreatment of another individual (Hinduja and Patchin, 2007). Even though cyber bullying does not involve physical aggression, it is still a form of aggression expressed through electronic means. Second, cyber bullying can be repeated over a period of time (Hinduja and Patchin, 2007). Through text messages, e-mails, and posts on social networking sites, cyber bullies are capable of harassing victims multiple times. Additionally, mass e-mails, mass texts, and messages or images shared on sites such as “Facebook” can be viewed by multiple individuals. Therefore, like traditional bullying, bystanders become aware of electronic aggression. Third, through repeated electronic aggression, cyber bullies acquire perceived or actual power over their victims (Hinduja and Patchin, 2007). For example, cyber bullies who have unlimited access to computers also have unlimited opportunities to send hurtful or threatening messages. The more messages sent without retaliation, the more powerful the cyber bully may feel. Despite their similarities, traditional bullying and cyber bullying have several differences as well.

The first difference between traditional bullying and cyber bullying is that it is more difficult to escape online aggression (Slonje and Smith, 2008). Traditional bully victims can experience relief from the time they get home to the following morning when they return to school. Cyber bully victims may receive harassing or threatening e-mails, texts, or other

messages at any time regardless of where they are. A second difference between the two involves the size and reach of the bullying audience (Slonje and Smith, 2008). A traditional bullying audience may range from a few witnesses to a crowd of students or bystanders. In contrast, electronic technology enables cyber bullies to share humiliating messages or images with much larger audiences. For example, a student who takes a nude photo of another student with his or her cell phone can share it with friends on “Facebook” or even post it on other Internet sites such as “MySpace” or “YouTube.” Subsequently, a photo taken by one individual can be viewed by thousands if not millions of other people.

Another difference between traditional bullying and cyber bullying is that cyber bullies can hide their identities from their victims (Slonje and Smith, 2008). For example, if a victim does not recognize a cell phone number, he or she will not know who has sent a harassing or intimidating text message. Additionally, identities of cyber bullies posting unwanted and embarrassing photos or other images on the Internet can remain unknown to not only victims, but bystanders as well. Unlike traditional bullying, cyber bullying is not a face-to-face form of aggression (Slonje and Smith, 2008). Cyber bullies may neither perceive their actions as bullying nor have awareness of adverse consequences for their actions. Unless cyber bullying acts are reported there are few opportunities for victims to receive empathy, remorse, and the support needed to avoid continued victimization (Slonje and Smith, 2008).

Common Forms of Cyber Bullying

According to Nuccitelli (2012), online aggressors use several different forms of cyber bullying to target their victims. Willard (2007) identifies four that are commonly used by adolescent students. Exclusion involves a student sending a provocative message to another

informing him or her that he or she will not be included in future social activities (Nuccitelli, 2012). For example, one student's success in an online video game may upset fellow competitors. As a result, disgruntled players may gang up on the previously successful gamer and restrict or eliminate his or her ability to participate. Students who experience exclusion become outcasts to the rest of the group they normally associate with. For adolescents, exclusion serves as the ultimate rejection that can significantly hinder self-esteem (Willard, 2007).

The second form of cyber bullying used by adolescent students involves flaming (Willard, 2007). Flaming refers to passionate, short-lived online arguments between students that often involve profanity, insults, and other vulgar language (Nuccitelli, 2012). Such communication is common in public online locations such as chat rooms, blogs, and instant messaging, which enables bystanders to view it and either attempt to quell it peacefully or to participate by taking sides. Flaming may also occur as a series of e-mails between two or more individuals. Even though flaming incidents are normally brief, increases in frequency, also referred to as "flame wars," may escalate to a point where threats of physical violence are made in order for one individual to shift the balance of power over another (Willard, 2007).

The third form involves harassment (Willard, 2007). Harassment is a very common form of cyber bullying where an adolescent student sends frequent hurtful, offensive, or other threatening electronic messages to another (Nuccitelli, 2012). Harassing messages can be sent through e-mail, texts, social networking sites, and other means of electronic or online communication. Electronic harassment could be compared to the verbal form of traditional bullying in that the intent is to tease, name-call, or torment victims. Unlike flaming, harassment

is a one-sided form of cyber bullying where the cyber bully maintains perceived or actual power over his or her victim (Willard, 2007). Passive victims usually ignore harassment and do not report it. However, long-term harassment may cause certain victims to respond in equally harmful ways, especially if messages involve hateful or biased language (Willard, 2007).

Another form of cyber bullying commonly used by adolescent students is denigration (Willard, 2007). Denigration involves sending or posting cruel, hurtful, and untrue statements or images about another (Nuccitelli, 2012). Such statements or images are often posted on Internet sites and subsequently sent to others through electronic means. Students resort to this form of cyber bullying to damage a fellow student's reputation. All forms of cyber bullying can be hurtful towards intended targets. However, victims of denigration tend to experience long-term emotional and social humiliation, as well as other adverse effects. Therefore, it is necessary for victims to report denigration as certain acts may constitute invasions of privacy (Willard, 2007).

Prevalence of Cyber Bullying Among Adolescent Students

As a newer form of aggression, much is to be learned about adolescent cyber bullying. Over the past several years, researchers have acquired empirical and statistical data regarding its frequency among adolescent students. For example, in 2006, Harris Interactive Market Research performed a national online survey of 824 randomly-selected middle and high school students between the ages of 13 and 17 (National Crime Prevention Council, 2007). The study revealed that more than half of 15 and 16-year-old students, predominantly females, reported frequent cyber bullying victimization (National Crime Prevention Council, 2007). Furthermore, approximately half believed cyber bullying was a problem in their schools because they

believed perpetrators were neither concerned about being caught nor concerned about the consequences of their actions (National Crime Prevention Council, 2007). A more recent study involved surveying a random sample of 4,441 students between the ages of 10 and 18 from 37 different schools in the southern U.S. (Cyber Bullying Research Center, 2010). The study revealed that approximately 21% of participants reported cyber bullying victimization had occurred at least once in their lives. Additionally, 17% of participants reported victimization within 30 days of the study being performed. Such an alarming statistic demonstrates how prevalent and problematic cyber bullying has become.

In May and June of 2006, Pergolizzi, Richmond, Macario, Gan, Richmond, and Macario (2009) performed a comprehensive empirical study involving 587 randomly-selected seventh and eighth graders from middle schools located in Miami, Florida, Naples, Florida, Palo Alto, California, and Baltimore, Maryland. Pergolizzi, et al. (2009) surveyed participants to determine perpetration and victimization of all types of bullying to include cyber bullying. Results revealed that 38.5% of participants admitted to committing at least some acts of bullying; 34.3% admitted to committing physical bullying; and 15.2% admitted to being cyber bullies (Pergolizzi, et al, 2009). Results further revealed that 27.9% of students reported being victims of cyber bullying at least on an occasional basis. However, only 5.2% of victims claimed they sought help from friends, faculty, or family (Pergolizzi, et al, 2009). Educators, parents, and other guardians cannot protect students from cyber bullies if electronic aggression is not reported.

The Internet and other electronic technology extend across the entire globe. International studies have been performed to determine adolescent cyber bullying prevalence as well. For example, Beran and Li (2005) surveyed 432 seventh, eighth, and ninth graders from

nine randomly-selected junior high schools in Calgary, Canada. Results indicated that 23% of participants reported victimization at least a few times and 22% admitted to cyber bullying fellow peers. Beran and Li (2005) also found that 53% reported receiving unwanted e-mail messages and 25% had been cyber bullied with harassing cell phone text messages. Data further revealed no significant variation in perpetration and victimization among genders (Beran and Li, 2005). Aside from the Canada study, the Australian Child Health Promotion Research Centre at Edith Cowan University performed a study to determine the prevalence of cyber bullying among child and adolescent students (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2010). Results indicated that nearly 10% of students in years four through nine reported cyber bullying victimization. Additionally, data indicated that students beyond year nine reported higher numbers. Researchers opined that older students were more knowledgeable about online technology, causing them to resort to electronic harassment as a means of bullying victims (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2010). As electronic technology and the Internet continue to evolve, the global prevalence of adolescent cyber bullying is likely to increase as well.

Adverse Effects and Consequences of Cyber Bullying

According to Shariff (2009), research suggests that adolescent victims of cyber bullying suffer similar adverse emotional effects that traditional bullying victims experience. For example, cyber bullying victims typically report feelings of anger, sadness, fear, and frustration. Furthermore, victims of online bullying are prone to experiencing adverse behavioral consequences as well (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009). Continuous victimization may lead to low levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-worth. Victims may develop patterns of tardiness or absence; perform poorly academically; avoid school and other social functions;

detach themselves from friends and other relationships; and resort to unhealthy behaviors such as substance abuse and other deviance or delinquency. Cyber bullying can be just as detrimental to perpetrators as well. Not only are aggressors just as likely to perform poorly in school and have unstable friendships and relationships, they too are susceptible to substance abuse and the commission of criminal or delinquent acts (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009).

The adverse effects of cyber bullying may involve more than fear, anger, frustration, and delinquent behavior. Chronic fears and anxieties of continuous victimization may lead to mental illness, particularly depression. Victims may experience mood swings, chronic sadness, weight and appetite fluctuations, insomnia, losses of interest in enjoyable activities, frequent head and stomach aches, and many other adverse physical and mental symptoms (Comer, 2007). Perpetrators may demonstrate symptoms of conduct disorders, personality disorders, and other serious mental illnesses recognized in the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of mental disorders (Drogin and Young, 2009). Due to shame or embarrassment, many do not report their victimization to parents, teachers, or others who could intervene or provide assistance (Willard, 2007). In addition, most Internet activity and other electronic communication are unsupervised by parents and other adults (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009). As a result, perpetrators and victims in need of psychiatric evaluations to determine manifestations of mental illnesses do not receive them, causing symptoms to deteriorate and other more drastic problems to occur.

Some cyber bullying victims possess the resiliency to either ignore cyber bullies or report victimization. However, others become so symptomatic and traumatized that they have suicidal ideations or even attempt suicide. In the spring of 2007, Hinduja and Patchin (2010)

surveyed 1,963 students from 30 different middle schools from one of the largest school districts in the U.S. to determine whether a relationship existed between cyber bullying and adolescent suicidal ideation and attempts. Results revealed that the most prevalent form of cyber bullying offending was defamation (23.1%) and that harassing messages (18.3%) were the most prevalent forms reported by victims (Hinduja and Patchin, 2010). Aside from 20% reporting past suicidal ideation and 19% claiming to have attempted suicide, Hinduja and Patchin (2010) further discovered that victims were 1.9 times more likely and offenders were 1.5 times more likely to have attempted suicide than students who had not reported cyber bullying perpetration or victimization. Even though the study demonstrated a relationship between cyber bullying and suicidal tendencies, Hinduja and Patchin (2010) opined that students who reported past suicidal ideations or attempts faced other challenges that were being further exacerbated by online aggression.

One of the earliest publicized incidents of the tragic consequences of adolescent cyber bullying involved the suicide of 13-year-old Vermont native Ryan Halligan on October 7, 2003 (Stevens, 2010). According to Stevens (2010), a female classmate of Halligan's, who pretended to be interested in him romantically, forwarded her instant messaging responses from him to several other classmates. Consequently, Halligan was repeatedly teased and ridiculed by his peers. Shortly before his death he confronted the female and learned she had played a prank on him because she thought he was a loser. Another highly-publicized suicide that resulted from cyber bullying involved 13-year-old Missouri native Megan Meier in October of 2006 (Stevens, 2010). According to Stevens (2010), Meier became attracted to Josh Evans, a 16-year-old she frequently communicated with on "MySpace." However, what Meier did not know was

that “Josh Evans” was a fictitious person created by Lori Drew, the mother of a friend who had had a falling-out with Meier shortly before the profile was created. After three weeks of correspondence Meier hanged herself in a closet after receiving a message from “Josh” stating that the world would be a better place without her. An investigation into Meier’s death revealed that since Drew’s actions violated MySpace’s terms of service agreement, federal prosecutors charged her with violating the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA) of 1986 (Meredith, 2011). Even though Drew was indicted and convicted in 2008, an appellate court reversed her conviction based on opinions that CFAA provisions did not apply to cyber bullying (Meredith, 2011).

Updated State Laws Addressing Cyber Bullying

The suicide of Megan Meier and the subsequent acquittal of Lori Drew prompted mass outrage and concern over a problem that had previously drawn little public attention. Consequently, the Missouri legislature felt obligated to review the state’s harassment laws. Prior to Meier’s suicide, the Missouri harassment law required offensive communication to be in writing, in person, or rendered over a telephone (Meredith, 2010). However, in 2008, the harassment statute, classified as a class “A” misdemeanor, was amended to include the criminalization of cyber bullying and any other form of online harassment (Meredith, 2010). The change in Missouri’s harassment law influenced other state legislatures to pass tough cyber bullying laws as well.

On April 9, 2009, the North Carolina legislature passed House Bill 1261, which created a new statute prohibiting cyber bullying and classifying it as a class “One” misdemeanor, punishable by up to one year in prison (Hinduja and Patchin, 2012). In June of 2010, the

Louisiana legislature passed House Bill 1259, Act 989, which made cyber bullying a criminal misdemeanor punishable by no more than a \$500 fine, imprisonment for no longer than six months, or both (Hinduja and Patchin, 2012). Additionally, on April 1, 2011, the Arkansas legislature passed Senate Bill 214, which established cyber bullying as a new criminal statute and a class “B” misdemeanor, punishable by no more than 90 days imprisonment (Hinduja and Patchin, 2012). Other states such as California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Kansas, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Utah specifically prohibit cyber bullying within their statutes. However, none of them criminally sanction the offense (Hinduja and Patchin, 2012). Criminalizing cyber bullying and other forms of electronic harassment sends a message that such acts are intolerable and can result in legal consequences.

Justification for enacting tough cyber bullying laws is debatable. Meredith (2010) opines that most of these new laws are the result of actions committed by an adult offender and that they will do little to prevent or deter offending by adolescents. Furthermore, legislation imposing criminal sanctions for cyber bullying will lead to future arguments about First Amendment rights violations and prosecutorial abuse, thus complicating enforcement of these new laws (Meredith, 2010). Therefore, states could best help children and adolescents by focusing on legislation that enhances education and awareness about the dangers of cyber bullying and how to prevent victimization resulting in adverse consequences (Meredith, 2010).

II. Theoretical Application

Literary, empirical, and statistical data demonstrate that cyber bullying is a growing problem with potentially dangerous consequences. Therefore, many people question why it has become so prevalent among adolescent students. Through years of research, Hinduja and

Patchin (2009) have ascertained specific reasons why adolescent students admitted to cyber bullying. The first and most prevalent reason involved revenge. For example, angry victims harassed online admitted to retaliating against their aggressors by sending harassing messages of their own. Second, many admitted to cyber bullying because they believed their victims deserved it for unspecified reasons. Finally, others admitted that cyber bullying was simply fun. Despite the aforementioned admissions, Hinduja and Patchin (2009) opine that no clear answer explains the occurrence of cyber bullying. However, certain criminological theories could be applied to better understand the causes and consequences of this relatively-new behavior among adolescent students (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009).

Routine Activity Theory (RAT)

Routine Activity Theory (RAT) argues that crime occurs when a motivated offender has ample opportunity to converge with a suitable target in the absence of capable guardianship (Cohen and Felson, 2006). Additionally, RAT suggests that routine activities such as school, work, family, and social activities influence risks of criminal victimization. The theory has also been used to explain geographic differences in crime rates, differences in victimization based on socio-demographic characteristics, and individual differences in crime. According to Navarro and Jasinski (2012), perceptions of anonymity motivate cyber bullies to use the Internet to prey on unsuspecting targets. Unlike other venues, the Internet is full of countless social activities that have no geographic limitation (Navarro and Jasinski, 2012). Furthermore, cyber-protection measures such as firewalls and anti-virus software are not designed to guard against cyber bullying on instant messaging, in chat rooms, and on other social networking sites favored by users (Holt and Bossler, 2009). Based on the aforementioned details, one could argue that RAT

can be applied to cyber bullying. However, few studies have sought to evaluate the theory's applicability to cyber crimes (Holt and Bossler, 2009). Therefore, more empirical evidence is required in order to strengthen the argument that the theory is applicable to adolescent cyber bullying.

From October 23 to November 19, 2006, Navarro and Jasinski (2012) obtained phone-survey data from a randomly-selected national sample of 935 teens ranging from 12 to 17 years old. Respondents were asked questions about online and offline experiences, as well as computer protection measures used. Study results revealed that nearly 62% of respondents reported using the Internet at least once a day and 90% reported online activities at least once a week. Results further revealed that 41% of instant messaging users and nearly 40% of social networking site users reported cyber bullying victimization at least once in their lives. Surprisingly, nearly 38% of users reported victimization while browsing entertainment sites. The authors predicted that users accessing these sites were exposed to offensive "pop-ups" or other forms of harassment. Among parental browser checks, filter installments, and protective software, filters were found to be the only guardianship that decreased cyber bullying risks. In addition, victims' gender was significant in the likelihood of cyber bullying as more adolescent females reported victimization than adolescent males. Even though more research is needed to examine activity and gender variations, Navarro and Jasinski (2012) concluded that RAT is a viable theory in the analysis of cyber bullying among adolescent students.

General Strain Theory (GST)

Another criminological theory that has been applied to adolescent crime, deviance, and delinquency is General Strain Theory (GST). According to Agnew (2001), strain occurs when an

individual fails to attain a positively-valued goal, loses positively-valued stimuli, and experiences negatively-valued stimuli. Agnew (2001) further mentions that strain creates negative emotions caused by negative interactions with others. Cyber bullying can produce strain among adolescents (Hinduja and Patchin, 2007). For example, harassing e-mails or defaming posts on social networking sites often causes victims to experience anger, sadness, fear, or frustration. Additionally, online exclusion interferes with efforts to seek acceptance and approval in a social world where status and respect is cherished (Hinduja and Patchin, 2007). Rejection, may cause adolescents to avoid online activities altogether if they fear continuous cyber bullying. Furthermore, fear of online harassment may lead to other social avoidances on and off school property. Constant states of hyper-vigilance are likely to hinder abilities to focus on academics, family matters and responsibilities, and other social choices (Hinduja and Patchin, 2007). The core argument of GST is that strain leads to crime (Agnew, 2001). Therefore, in order to strengthen the applicability of GST to cyber bullying, Hinduja and Patchin (2007) performed a global online study to determine whether strain from cyber bullying led to criminal, delinquent, or other volatile behaviors among adolescents.

From December 22, 2004 to January 22, 2005, Hinduja and Patchin (2007) electronically surveyed 1,388 adolescent students between the ages of six and 17. Among participants, 50.4% were female, 79.9% were Caucasian, and 74.5% resided in the U.S. Data analysis revealed that over 32% of males and over 36% of females reported cyber bullying victimization from any location. Measurements of strain revealed that over 60% of respondents felt they had been treated unfairly; had recently received a poor grade on an exam; or had recently been in an argument with a family member shortly after victimization. Regarding reported deviance

or delinquency, 33.6% consumed alcohol, 29.7% cheated on an exam, 24.3% committed truancy, 18.4% assaulted a peer, and 13% damaged property within 30 days of victimization (Hinduja and Patchin, 2007). Despite limitations that accompany any empirical study, the above data demonstrates that cyber bullying serves as a potent form of strain capable of causing significant school problems, deviance, and delinquency among adolescent students.

III. School-Based Cyber Bullying Prevention Programs

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, which oversees public education statewide, provides two bullying prevention programs derived from its Developmental Guidance and Health Education curriculum (Evers, 2010). Both can be accessed and used by teachers and schools as either their primary bullying prevention education or as a supplement to what they already provide. One educates third, fourth, and fifth graders about what bullying is, what acts constitute bullying, and what students should do if they are victimized or know about another's victimization. The program provided to sixth, seventh, and eighth graders also emphasize problem-solving measures to avoid traditional bullying perpetration and victimization. However, it also consists of two 45-minute classes designed to educate these students about cyber bullying.

The first class consists of four activities (Evers, 2010). First, students learn the definition of cyber bullying, differences between cyber bullying and simple online harassment, and the adverse effects that may result from it. Cyber bullying is not fun and games that should be taken for granted. Trauma resulting from victimization has ranged from long-term mental health problems to suicide (Stevens, 2010). Therefore, the activity teaches adolescent students

that cyber bullying is unacceptable behavior where consequences can be devastating. The second activity involves students learning about the growing prevalence of cyber bullying. Like adolescents, technology is young, fast-paced, and ever changing. Even though technology has many educational benefits, educators fear the dangers adolescents can be exposed to through new technologies (Hertz and Ferdon, 2008). Educating students about the downside of fast-paced technology can empower them to adopt more responsible practices with devices that have internet capabilities.

The third activity involves teachers explaining similarities and differences between cyber bullying and traditional bullying. Students must understand that cyber bullying is a type of bullying where acts are repeated over time and that, like traditional bullies, cyber bullies seek to obtain real or perceived senses of power over another (McWhirter, et al, 2007). Real or perceived senses of power are often enhanced when cyber bullies believe they are invisible to their victims and that their actions are untraceable (Carpenter, 2009). Even though cyber bullies attempt to justify their actions as harmless, they often do not think about the potential harm cyber bullying can cause. Teachers stress that even though the means of communication are different, cyber bullying is still bullying (Evers, 2010).

The final activity involves students performing individual practical exercises to determine whether they understand the differences between cyber bullying and simple online harassment. Figure 1 provides a few sample exercise questions with their correct answers. The intent of the exercise is to ensure students comprehend the power element associated with cyber bullying. Once students finish their exercises teachers review all questions with the class to determine how well they performed. In addition to answering questions and obtaining

student feedback, teachers end the class by handing out an “Anti-Cyber Bullying Contract,” presented in Figure 2, for students to take home to their parents and to bring back the next day before commencing the second class. In addition, students are provided with a worksheet outlining precautionary measures students and parents can take to prevent perpetration and victimization. Internet use contracts not only promote trust between students and parents; they inform parents about a problem they normally know little about (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009).

<p>A popular athlete repeatedly sends an offensive and embarrassing message to a short, shy, underclassman in an e-mail and convinces other teammates to send messages also. Is this cyber bullying?</p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Why? The message has the characteristics of repetition, is meant to cause harm, demonstrates a power imbalance, and has been communicated electronically.</p> <p>One student sends messages pretending to be someone else. Is this cyber bullying?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Why? There is no apparent intent to cause harm or to establish a power differential. It would be cyber bullying if the act was repeated.</p> <p>The editor of the school newspaper e-mails an embarrassing photo of an overweight girl in a swimsuit to friends and the girl in the photo. The editor jokes about the girl’s weight and tells her friends to forward the photo to their contacts to humiliate her. Is this cyber bullying?</p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Why? It is an electronic message intended to harm through humiliation. There is also a power differential through having a group share in the sending of the photo.</p>

Figure 1 (Evers, 2010)

After collecting completed and signed contracts from all students, teachers begin the second class by briefly reviewing material from the first one. Upon finishing the review, teachers inform students that they will be spending the entire second day learning how to properly confront cyber bullying behavior. According to Evers (2010), teachers inform students

that they can responsibly handle cyber bullying incidents by practicing five steps. The first involves **recognizing** that cyber bullying, regardless of the type or form, is not normal or acceptable behavior. The second step involves **explaining** school rules prohibiting the behavior or **exploring** appropriate methods to handle the situation. The third step involves **acting** responsibly to report cyber bullying if one is victimized or aware of another student's victimization. The fourth step involves **caring** for self or other victims and the cyber bully by not accepting the behavior. The fifth and final step involves **talking** to key adults or friends who also believe cyber bullying is wrong. The first letters of the five words in bold create the acronym **REACT**, which is designed to further simplify the five steps for students to remember should they ever need to handle cyber bullying incidents. Once students are finished learning the contents of REACT they are afforded the opportunity to apply it in a second practical exercise.

Anti-Cyber Bullying Contract	
<p>I, _____, am aware of the emotional and physical effects of cyber bullying. I will try to stop cyber bullying when I witness it. One thing I will do is:</p> <p>I have had a discussion regarding cyber bullying with my parent(s) or guardian. My parent(s) or guardian has/have pledged to try and keep our home free from cyber bullying. My parent(s) or guardian will do that by:</p> <p>Parent(s) or Guardian Signature _____ Date _____</p> <p>Student Signature _____ Date _____</p>	

Figure 2 (Evers, 2010)

The final activity of the two-day cyber bullying class involves teachers handing out worksheets consisting of a few fictitious cyber bullying scenarios. Students are instructed to read each scenario, identify how each character is likely to feel emotionally, and apply the REACT content to properly handle the incident (Evers, 2010). Figure 3 demonstrates proper application of REACT to one of the scenarios. Scenarios are excellent educational tools because they portray real-life cyber bullying situations and prompt problem-solving and subsequent discussion (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009). Teachers end the class by discussing scenarios, obtaining feedback, and answering questions. The overall purpose of this lesson is to provide Wisconsin public schools with a means to educate adolescent students about cyber bullying. In addition, the Milwaukee Public School District has its own cyber bullying awareness and prevention programs implemented within its curriculum.

Cyber Bullying Scenarios	
Nicole is angry at her friend Mary because the boy Nicole likes is interested in Mary. Nicole has written some mean and hurtful things about Mary on MySpace on a number of occasions. When confronted by Mary, Nicole denies any involvement and says someone must be using her password.	
How do you think Nicole is feeling?	How do you think Mary is feeling?
Hurt, angry	hurt, upset, angry
What can Mary do? (Use the steps that are appropriate for this situation)	
R: Recognize that even though Nicole does not admit to the bullying, it is not alright.	
E: Explore how to delete or edit the comments.	
A: Act to make a parent or guardian and the school aware of the situation. Copy comments made on MySpace.	
C: Communicate with Nicole about her feelings of betrayal and hurt.	
T: Tell her parents and teachers about her thoughts and feelings and that Nicole might be responsible for the act.	

Figure 3 (Evers, 2010)

Milwaukee Public School District

The Milwaukee Public School District's health education program provides teachers with a variety of physical, emotional, social, and spiritual lessons and activities derived from its Human Growth and Development curriculum (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2012). In accordance with the National Health Education Standards, the district's cyber bullying lesson has one primary focus and two secondary focuses. The primary focus is to help students learn to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and to avoid risks. The first secondary focus empowers students to learn and understand concepts related to health promotion. The other secondary focus empowers students to practice more health-enhancing behaviors than unhealthy ones (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2012). Research indicates that students who believe that teachers and school officials care about them are less likely to engage in any type of violence or aggression, to include online aggression (Hertz and Ferdon, 2008). Therefore, the Milwaukee Public School District provides cyber bullying awareness and prevention education that consists of three 15-minute activities.

The first activity involves students watching a 45-second video titled the "Cyber Bullying Talent Show" (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2012). In the video, an adolescent student named Lindsey stands on a stage in front of a large audience and informs everyone that Patty, a fellow classmate and audience member, is "stupid, ugly, and that she stuffs her face when eating." Lindsey further informs the audience that "Patty's family has no money because her father does not work and that everybody, including the teachers, hates her even though they are supposed to like everybody." Lindsey ends her speech by telling Patty to "get a life; nobody likes you." The video serves as a metaphor demonstrating that things one would not likely say

to another in person should not be communicated online. It mimics cyber bullying prevention videos portrayed on the U.S. Government's bullying prevention website (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2011). The videos are designed to demonstrate that cyber bullying is a source of strain that can be very debilitating to a student's overall well-being. Upon completion of the "Cyber Bullying Talent Show," teachers ask students how the video made them feel; whether a student would say such things in person; why students say hurtful things to others online; and whether they believe cyber bullying is not as bad as traditional bullying (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2012).

The second activity involves teachers passing out a "Cyber Bullying Key Concepts" worksheet, discussing its material with students, and asking them if they have questions or would like to add to the list (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2012). The worksheet serves several purposes. First, it defines cyber bullying by explaining the available means to engage in it. Second, it describes specific adverse effects and consequences that can occur as a result of it. Third, it explains common reasons students engage in cyber bullying. Finally, it provides recommendations for safe online use and proper measures to take in the event of victimization. Once students are finished asking questions or providing additional ideas, teachers prepare for the third and final activity.

The final activity involves teachers dividing the class into groups of three and providing them with copies of a newspaper article about a past cyber bullying incident with serious personal, legal or other consequences (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2012). In addition, teachers provide each group with a group report sheet, depicted in Figure 4, and assigning each member

as a leader, a recorder, or a reporter. Leaders maintain group focus and participation.

Recorders write answers to the report sheet questions that reporters read to rest of the class.

Group Report Sheet		
Name: _____	Name: _____	Name: _____
Name of article: _____		
Source and date of publication: _____		
Who was hurt by the cyber bullying and how were they hurt? What were the consequences for those involved?		
Why did the students engage in this behavior?		
What are some strategies these teens could have used to avoid the situation?		

Figure 4 (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2012)

Once all reporters have finished reading their group's answers, teachers end the lesson by asking students if they have additional comments or questions. Due to its large enrollment, the Milwaukee Public School District recognizes the importance of ensuring its students are capable of recognizing cyber bullying; taking appropriate measures to minimize or avoid victimization; and making proper decisions when reporting its occurrence.

Overview of Both Programs

Without empirical data and other evidence from program evaluations, the true effectiveness of both programs is very difficult to measure. Less formal assessments can be made by reviewing their strengths and weaknesses. For example, both are similar in that they provide students with clear definitions of cyber bullying, how acts can be committed, and how harmful it can be. Additionally, both employ practical exercises that enable students to apply what they have learned and to demonstrate they understand program material. However, only the Milwaukee program educates students about possible legal consequences associated with cyber bullying. Conversely, only the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's lesson provides an exercise involving any sort of parental participation. Even though Evers (2010) provides an additional day of instruction and more hands-on activities, cyber bullying is too complex of a problem to address in one or two class periods. Any acquired knowledge and skills are perishable if adolescents are not encouraged to apply or practice them on a more frequent basis. The aforementioned shortcomings do not make cyber bullying awareness, prevention, and intervention a lost cause. In fact, a more comprehensive and collective effort by all available community resources is required in order to prevent cyber bullying and promote responsible Internet use among adolescent students.

V. Recommendations for a Comprehensive Cyber Bullying Prevention Strategy

As Internet technology continues to rapidly evolve, adolescents will continue to explore its capabilities. Unfortunately, the more time spent online, the more vulnerable adolescent students will be to cyber bullying (Hertz and Ferdon, 2008). Even though schools play a vital role in providing awareness and education, their efforts alone are not enough to prevent cyber

bullying and other forms of online aggression. Not only is cyber bullying a newer form of bullying that predominantly occurs away from schools, it can be committed at any time from any location. Therefore, a comprehensive education and prevention strategy involving parents, adolescents, educators, law enforcement, and other community resources is required to prevent cyber bullying and to promote responsible Internet use (Carpenter, 2009).

Parental Roles in Cyber Bullying Education and Prevention

Since cyber bullying normally occurs while adolescents are at home, parents must assume proactive roles in cyber bullying education and prevention (Feinberg and Robey, 2009). Parents decide whether to purchase computers and cell phones for adolescents or allow them to purchase these items on their own. Before making such purchases, parents should become familiar with these forms of technology to determine what, if any harm can occur while they are used. More importantly, they should develop and follow an action plan consisting of various steps to take in order to educate adolescents about cyber bullying, to support and protect them in the event of victimization, and to promote responsible use of Internet technology (Feinberg and Robey, 2009).

The first step for parents to take is to learn as much as possible about cyber bullying to include its definition, its forms, its prevalence, and the adverse effects that can result from it. Parents should then convey such knowledge to adolescents and explain that they are doing so because they love them and are always concerned about their well-being. Parents need to ensure adolescents understand that cyber bullying is not harmless and that it can be just as problematic as traditional bullying. Since adolescents are often reluctant to report victimization, parents need to pay attention to warning signs indicative of cyber bullying and

intervene to prevent health deterioration or even suicide (Feinberg and Robey, 2009).

Regardless of whether warning signs are exhibited, parents need to maintain open, frequent, and compassionate communication regarding Internet technology use and encourage adolescents to report cyber bullying or other online aggression immediately after it occurs.

The second step involves parents helping adolescents to establish proper measures to take in the event of cyber bullying victimization. Feinberg and Robey (2009) provide several recommendations. First, rather than retaliate against cyber bullying, victims should inform their parents about the incident immediately or as soon as possible. Additionally, parents should ensure that victims change their usernames and passwords on all of their electronic accounts to minimize future incidents. Second, if subsequent victimization continues, victims should save harassing or other inappropriate text messages, e-mails, or other content and show it to their parents. If possible, messages or images should be printed or copied as they could be inadvertently lost or erased when saved on computers or cell phones. Third, parents have the option of reporting cyber bullying to the police. Providing officers with evidence of cyber bullying can enable police departments to perform investigations required to identify offenders and to take necessary measures to ensure future acts are prevented.

The third step involves parents reporting cyber bullying incidents to their Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and inquiring about certain protective measures offered by them (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009). Many ISPs offer filtering software that blocks violent or pornographic material, as well as other Internet content that is inappropriate for adolescents. Additionally, content monitoring software ensures inappropriate web sites cannot be accessed based on a word-blocking approach. For example, adolescents attempting to access bomb-

making or weapons web sites cannot do so if they type words such as “bombs” or “guns.” Most Internet activities performed by adolescents are unsupervised (Willard, 2007). Therefore, the implementation of monitoring and filtering software can serve as a guardianship that can prevent exposure to potentially harmful online material.

An additional step parents should take to prevent both cyber bullying perpetration and victimization is to draft clear and concise rules on “Internet Use” contracts to ensure that adolescents not only understand them, but comply with them as well. Hinduja and Patchin (2009) provide examples of computer and Internet rules that should include, but not be limited to the following:

1. I will respect the privacy of others who use the computer. I will not open, move, or delete files that do not belong to me.
2. I understand that my parents may access my online activities at any time.
3. I will not download any material or install any programs without permission.
4. I will not provide my name, address, phone number, social security number, and other private information to anyone online.
5. I will not post anything online that I would not want my parents to see.
6. I will not send harmful e-mail messages to others.
7. I will report suspicious or harmful materials to my parents immediately.
8. I understand that computer use is a privilege and that such a privilege may be taken away if I do not comply with any or all of the above rules.

Additionally, parents should draft “Cell Phone Use” contracts to promote responsible use of cell phones. Hinduja and Patchin (2009) also provide examples of cell phone rules that should include, but not be limited to the following:

1. I will not give my cell phone number to anyone unless my parents permit me to do so.
2. I will follow all rules pertaining to cell phone use at school.
3. I will not use my cell phone after ____ AM/PM on a school night or after ____ AM/PM on a non-school night unless approved by my parents.
4. I will not send harassing or hurtful texts or other messages to anyone.
5. I will not say harassing or hurtful things to others that I would not want my parents to hear.

6. I will not enable or disable cell phone settings without my parents' permission.
7. I will not take, post, or send inappropriate pictures or images with my cell phone.
8. I will report suspicious texts, images, or other inappropriate messages to my parents immediately.
9. I understand that my cell phone is a privilege and that such a privilege may be taken away if I do not comply with any or all of the above rules.

Once both parents and adolescents sign the contracts they should be posted in places where they will serve as constant reminders (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009). For example, "Internet Use" contracts should be posted adjacent to the computer so that they remain in plain sight. "Cell Phone Use" contracts should be posted on refrigerators, in bathrooms, or at other locations within the home where they can be frequently seen. By establishing and enforcing computer and cell phone rules, parents can effectively educate adolescents about responsible uses of technology and prevent cyber bullying. However, what they cannot control is what other adolescents are doing with their computers and cell phones. Therefore, additional support is needed in the efforts to educate adolescents about cyber bullying and to prevent its occurrence.

The Educator's Role in Cyber Bullying Education and Prevention

Needs Assessments

Middle schools that do not have cyber bullying awareness and education in their curricula should first perform a needs assessment. Needs assessments help to determine the current state of online behaviors among a student population (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009). Through the use of anonymous surveys, educators can assess the level of cyber bullying occurring in middle schools and the impact it is having on students and the educational environment. Appropriate sampling should be performed as not all students need to complete the survey (Willard, 2007). Aside from obtaining demographic characteristics such as age,

gender, and race, surveys must clearly define cyber bullying so that students understand questions focused on cyber bullying victimization, perpetration, prevalence, reasons for committing it, and whether it has caused fear or other adverse effects such as truancy or physical or mental anguish. All middle schools district wide should participate in an assessment so as to obtain comprehensive data. Additionally, districts should consider partnering with a local college or university for data collection, analysis, and interpretation as faculty members generally have the experience needed to perform such tasks (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009). Once need assessments are analyzed and evaluated, educators can use them to not only determine how problematic cyber bullying is within their environment, but what actions are needed to properly address it.

Program Evaluations

Even though the cyber bullying programs provided by the Milwaukee Public School District and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction outline their lessons and activities, they fail to demonstrate program effectiveness. All social programs, including school-based programs, are designed to identify social problems and improve social conditions (Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, 2004). School-based program stakeholders such as students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and communities as a whole expect desired outcomes to occur as a result of program participation. In order to determine whether middle school cyber bullying awareness and education programs are effective, outcome evaluations should be periodically performed.

Educators interested in evaluating the effectiveness of school-based bullying prevention programs normally do not have adequate time, money, and other resources needed to perform

true experimental designs (Olweus, 2005). An alternative method involves using a time-series design, a type of quasi-experimental design where a series of observations of a group are made before and after introduction of an experimental stimulus (Sullivan, 1992). Time-series experiments for cyber bullying program outcome evaluations would require the development of pretest and posttest surveys to be administered to students before and after program participation in order to measure program effectiveness. Survey questions should ask students whether they know what cyber bullying is, the means available to perform it, whether it is more or less harmful than traditional bullying, whether students have committed cyber bullying in the past or have been victimized by it, whether physical or mental harm can occur from its behavior, other negative personal and legal consequences, and effective protection measures available to avoid victimization. Once surveys have been drafted, educators can proceed with additional planning required to perform the experiment.

The next step in the process would be to determine when to begin obtaining pretest measurements. For example, if middle school students receive cyber bullying education as seventh graders, a strong baseline of outcome measurements, or pretests, should be initiated when students begin the sixth grade. Additional pretests should be administered at the end of each semester, at the beginning of the seventh grade, and two weeks before program participation. Upon completion of the program, students should complete their first posttest no later than two weeks after program attendance and subsequent posttests should be administered at the end of each semester up to completing the eighth grade. If students receive program instruction in the first semester of the seventh grade the design model would resemble the following:

O1 O2 O3 O4 O5 X O6 O7 O8 O9 O10 O11

If posttest evaluations reveal an effect at O6 teachers and any assisting researchers could argue that the effect is likely a result of program participation (Sullivan, 2012). Internal validity threats such as history are less protected when performing quasi-experimental designs as opposed to true experiments (Sullivan, 1992). However, internal validity threats are normally minimal when studying the same population over a relatively brief period of time (Olweus, 2005). The use of the time-series design should provide cyber bullying awareness and prevention program stakeholders with at least a preliminary revelation of whether desired program outcomes are being met.

Rules and Policies Regarding the Use of the Internet and other Technology

Due to fears of violating students' First Amendment rights to free speech, school districts are often hesitant to draft rules or policies regarding Internet technology used in educational environments. What middle and other school staff and administrators need to know is that certain landmark court decisions can be applied to enforcing and preventing cyber bullying on school property. For example, in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that students wearing black arm bands to school in protest of the Vietnam War constituted a "substantial disruption" to the school's ability to maintain discipline within its environment (Tager, 2009). Additionally, in *Boucher v. School District of Greenfield*, a Federal Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that a student's distribution of a "Hacker's Handbook" served as a "substantial disruption" to school operations and that intervention was warranted (Tager, 2009). Known today as the *Tinker* standard, schools can

apply it to all situations where student actions are likely to disrupt student safety and the educational environment as a whole.

Since cyber bullying can hinder student learning and safety, middle school staff should develop and proactively enforce Internet and technology use policies within the school. The Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section of the U.S. Department of Justice provides an example of an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP), which governs the use of technology provided by or used in schools and is signed by both students and their parents (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009). All middle schools should draft clear and concise AUPs for students and parents to read and sign each year so that everyone has a clear understanding of permissible technology use, as well as the repercussions for misuse. Additionally, educators should post a list of computer use rules next to all school computers to remind students of what they are. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2009), examples of rules should include, but not be limited to the following:

1. Computer or Internet use is for educational purposes only.
2. Games are not to be played unless authorized by teachers or staff.
3. Computers and their settings are not to be altered or damaged in any way.
4. Computers will not be used to harm others in any way.
5. The use of profane or other offensive language on computers is prohibited.
6. Discussions on chat rooms or MySpace are prohibited.
7. Any violations may result in disciplinary action imposed at the discretion of teachers or other school staff.

Another measure would be to install hardware and software firewalls and filters to block access to unauthorized sites. After all, many adolescents either ignore rules or believe their violations will not be discovered (Carpenter, 2009). By installing the aforementioned protection devices, schools provide guardianship that prevents potentially-motivated cyber bullies from committing harmful acts or being exposed to harmful or inappropriate material.

School computers are not the only technological devices used in middle schools. Approximately half of all adolescent students own cell phones with texting, Internet, and photo-taking capabilities (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2012). Not only do cell phones serve as another means to engage in cyber bullying, they can disrupt abilities to maintain order and discipline within the academic environment. Therefore, it is imperative that cell phone use and possession policies be included in AUP agreements. Middle schools may permit students to bring cell phones to school. However, they should mandate that all phones be turned off, secured in lockers or other venues, and not be permitted in classrooms, bathrooms, locker rooms and hallways. By restricting cell phone use and regulating Internet activities on school computers, middle school teachers and staff significantly reduce opportunities for students to bully each other online.

Anonymous Reporting of Cyber Bullying Incidents

Victims of cyber bullying are often reluctant to report their victimization for many reasons (Willard, 2007). Victims tend to believe that teachers and other caregivers will not be caring or compassionate about their concerns. Many victims believe that even if they report incidents, offenders will continue to cyber bully them. Also, victims often fear that reporting will result in retaliation. Middle school teachers and administrators need to understand that cyber bullying victimization can cause significant strain on adolescent students. Therefore, students should be afforded unconditional opportunities to report victimization promptly so that teachers and staff can expeditiously address such problems.

In order to significantly reduce the likelihood of retaliation, middle school staff should adopt an anonymous reporting system for students to report cyber bullying victimization.

Anonymous reporting can be effectively performed in two ways (Willard, 2007). The first method involves students meeting privately with teachers or staff, revealing printed material or other evidence detailing the incident, and receiving reassurance that the incident will be kept confidential. The second method involves implementing an anonymous online reporting system for students to access in the event of cyber bullying victimization. The system should enable students to file an electronic complaint and to attach or forward harmful material to school staff. Anonymous online reporting could serve as a significant deterrent to cyber bullying because it places cyber bullies and prospective bullies in a situation where they will never know who might download harmful materials and report them (Willard, 2007).

Regardless of how it is performed, anonymous reporting of cyber bullying victimization can minimize its occurrence and instill confidence in adolescent students that their problems will be appropriately addressed.

Disciplinary Action by Middle School Educators

As long as middle school educators can clearly demonstrate that cyber bullying incidents serve as “substantial disruptions” towards student’s and educator’s abilities to learn and operate as an effective educational unit, middle schools can hold cyber bullies accountable for their actions (Shariff, 2009). When drafting annual AUPs, educators and administrators need to ensure that the consequences for violating technology use rules and policies are fair and precise. Penalties should be adequately balanced so that they are neither too harsh nor too lenient. Formal disciplinary responses by educators are unlikely to completely resolve cyber bullying issues (Willard, 2007). Thus, educators should work with parents to ensure cyber bullying incidents are handled accordingly.

Upon notification of cyber bullying incidents educators should contact the parents of offenders as soon as possible and inform them of the situation. Educators should also inform school principals about cyber bullying incidents and request their assistance when addressing student-parent issues (Willard, 2007). Incident severity should determine the type of interaction between parents and educators. For example, educators reporting a student for a first cyber bullying offense may be able to resolve the matter by simply calling the student's parents, providing them with incident details, and reminding them that future misconduct will result in sanctions outlined in the AUP. Other incidents such as repeat offenses should involve students and parents meeting with educators in person. During such meetings, some parents may deny that their children would commit cyber bullying (Willard, 2007). Therefore, educators should ensure parents are aware of the characteristics of cyber bullying and offer to provide more information about it if such a request is made. Meetings should end with all parties discussing problem-solving measures that could remedy the problem as well as appropriate disciplinary measures to be taken in accordance with the AUP. By working together, parents and educators demonstrate to adolescent students that cyber bullying is a serious matter that will not be tolerated.

The Roles of Law Enforcement and the Community

Aside from enforcing state cyber bullying laws and responding to cyber bullying complaints, police officers can assist middle schools with cyber bullying awareness, education, and prevention by performing a number of activities. First, middle schools that do not employ School Resource Officers (SROs) should invite other officers to come to their schools and educate adolescents about cyber bullying and other forms of online harassment. Adolescents

are likely to be receptive towards uniformed officers who tactfully yet strongly convey to them the characteristics, dangers, and potential legal consequences of cyber bullying and the importance of reporting victimization to self and others (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009). Second, middle schools that provide cyber bullying awareness and prevention programs should ask SROs or other officers to participate in program instruction as their expertise can reinforce material taught by educators. Additionally, educators and school administrators should ask officers to review cyber bullying program material and request that they provide feedback regarding program quality and whether any additions or improvements are required. As positive and influential role models to adolescents, police officers can play a key role in middle school cyber bullying education and prevention.

Middle schools are not the only venues that can benefit from law enforcement assistance in cyber bullying education and prevention. As a behavior that predominantly occurs away from schools, cyber bullying serves as a social problem that can adversely affect entire communities. Therefore, police departments should operate in accordance with the community-policing model and identify ways to proactively address cyber bullying. Community policing is an organization-wide philosophy and management approach that promotes community, government, and police partnerships; provides proactive problem-solving methods to prevent crimes; and encourages community involvement to address causes of crime, fears of crime, and other community issues (Miller and Hess, 2008). As a relatively-new form of adolescent aggression, many community members may know little about cyber bullying. Therefore, through community wide partnerships, proactive problem-solving measures, and

other community involvement, police officers can educate the public about cyber bullying and promote prevention efforts.

The frequent use of computers, cell phones, and other technological entertainment has caused many adolescents to refrain from or lose interest in other more healthy activities (Hertz and Ferdon, 2008). One way to prevent cyber bullying is to reduce adolescents' opportunities to commit it. By partnering with the YMCA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and other youth-serving organizations, police departments and other community members can encourage adolescents to participate in after-school programs that can create friendships, build relationships, instill discipline, promote teamwork, and teach personal responsibility (Miller and Hess, 2008). Avid participation in after-school programs can teach adolescents that there are other fun alternatives to Internet technology.

Another approach police departments should take to address cyber bullying is to enhance problem-solving tactics. Police officers can best serve the community by involving members in the problem-solving process (Miller and Hess, 2008). Through the use of the department's web site, public service announcements (PSAs), other media assistance, and occasional city or town hall meetings, officers can educate community members about cyber bullying and encourage public feedback, questions, and other responses. For example, departments should post links on their web sites describing cyber bullying, how it can be performed, how prevalent it has become, what adverse effects can result from both perpetration and victimization, and effective measures to take to prevent it from occurring. Furthermore, department web sites should provide an anonymous reporting system for all community members to access should they need to report cyber bullying incidents involving

threats of violence or other criminal violations. Like other crimes, cyber bullying and other forms of electronic harassment require a collective effort between law enforcement and community members to identify incidents, to report them expeditiously, and to prevent future incidents from occurring.

VI. Summary and Conclusions

Traditional bullying that primarily occurs within school environments is no longer the only form of adolescent aggression challenging middle school students, parents, educators, law enforcement, and society as a whole. Computers, cell phones, and other forms of Internet technology provide adolescents with the means and opportunities to bully their peers online. Like traditional bullying, cyber bullying involves an imbalance of power with repeated acts of aggression over extended periods of time. Unlike traditional bullies, cyber bullies can hide their identities as they target victims at any time from any location. Therefore, the unlimited reach afforded to cyber bullies provides little if any relief for victims.

The rapid evolution of Internet technology complicates efforts to assess the growing prevalence of cyber bullying. By surveying adolescents worldwide, researchers have obtained empirical and statistical data demonstrating that a significant number of adolescents have either committed cyber bullying or have been victimized by it. Aside from adverse emotions and decreases in self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-worth, victimization can lead to anxiety disorders, depression, other mental illnesses, and even suicide. Public outrage from highly-publicized cyber bullying-related suicides has prompted many state legislatures to enact tough cyber bullying laws with penal consequences. However, many people question whether tougher laws are the answer to cyber bullying deterrence and prevention.

The successful applications of Routine Activity Theory (RAT) and General Strain Theory (GST) demonstrate that cyber bullying is a social problem requiring intervention by adult caregivers. Implementations of middle school cyber bullying education and prevention programs further demonstrate that educators and administrators recognize the problem and care about the well-being of students. However, since cyber bullying primarily occurs away from the school environment, parents, law enforcement officers, and other influential adults within the community must join educators in a more comprehensive approach to educate adolescents about cyber bullying and to prevent perpetration and victimization.

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