COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TOWARD
CYBERBULLYING: THE VICTIM’S
AGE & SEX MATTER

by

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ABSTRACT

The current study was the first to examine community attitudes of cyberbullying through vignettes, or hypothetical cyberbullying scenarios. This study had four specific aims: (1) to examine whether community attitudes of cyberbullying are biased depending on the victims’ sex and age, (2) to examine whether community attitudes of cyberbullying differ depending on the type of cyberbullying incident (e.g., YouTube® video, Facebook® post), (3) to examine whether individuals cognitive dispositions effect their attitudes toward cyberbullying, (4) to examine whether individuals type and frequency of media exposure effects their attitudes toward cyberbullying, (5) to determine whether respondent’s thought the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights were being violated or not, (6) to examine if the demographics (e.g., sex or being a parent) of the respondent effect their sensitivity levels in each vignette.

This study was conducted online using an Internet-based survey, which targeted respondents over the age of 19 located in the United States. Respondents were selected using online social media sites, chat rooms, and discussion forums. A 3 x 4 mixed-subjects design with 12 conditions was used, meaning that the survey included a series of three randomized vignettes and questions regarding community attitudes of the hypothetical scenarios provided.

Results suggested that females are in general more sensitive to cyberbullying victims than males. Second, respondents were more sensitive to younger victims of cyberbullying. Third, males were more likely to believe the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights had been violated when compared to females. Fourth, parents are overall more sensitive to victims of
cyberbullying. Fifth, individuals who have low social values are less sensitive to victims of cyberbullying. Lastly, no relationship was found between media exposure and sensitivity levels. Overall, this study revealed numerous statistically significant findings, but with this type of research there are always limitations, which will be discussed.

Keywords: cyberbullying, community attitudes, First Amendment, vignette, sex, victim
DEDICATION

To my boyfriend and godparents who provided me with encouraging words and support throughout the whole process.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

\(a\)  Cronbach’s index of internal consistency

\(b\)  Unstandardized regression coefficient

\(F\)  Fisher’s \(F\) ratio

\(M\)  Mean: the sum of a set of measurements divided by the number of measurements in the set

\(r_{pb}\)  Point-biseral correlation

\(p\)  Probability associated with the occurrence under the null hypothesis of a value as extreme as or more extreme than the observed value

\(r\)  Pearson product-moment correlation

\(SD\)  Standard deviation

\(t\)  Computed value of \(t\) test

<  Less than

=  Equal to
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

As of June 2012, 78.6% or 12,988,223 individuals in the United States use the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2013). While technological advances such as the World Wide Web have helped our society and been beneficial in numerous aspects, they have also created more convenient avenues for detrimental behaviors including cyberbullying. Social networking websites, emails, blogs, and instant messaging programs have made it easier for people to express their feelings and opinions whether they are positive or negative. There are many different types of cyberbullying, which are estimated to affect around half of all adolescents and teens in the United States per year, causing many individuals to develop psychological trauma and even commit suicide (i-Safe Foundation, 2004). Despite the fact that so many individuals have witnessed cyberbullying, been a victim, or perpetrated this behavior, many states still do not have a criminal law that addresses cyberbullying.

Although there is not one cohesive definition of cyberbullying, the simplest definition provided by Patchin and Hinduja is “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text” (2006, p. 152). Schools, educators, and law enforcement agencies have not successfully solved this problem, in part due to First Amendment issues. There is a fine line between freedom of speech and protecting the victim. Some people believe victims of cyberbullying should have "tougher skin" and not let it bother them while others believe cyberbullying should be an offense that is punishable by law (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011).
The purpose of this study was to examine community attitudes towards cyberbullying, cyberbullying laws, and whether or not those laws infringe upon individuals’ constitutional rights. A description of cyberbullying, the psychosocial effects of cyberbullying, current laws regarding cyberbullying, the methodology of this study and lastly, policy implications, are presented here.
CHAPTER 2
WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?

a. History of Bullying and Cyberbullying

Bullying, a term that has existed since the 1980s, is usually defined as an aggressive, deliberate behavior, which is committed by one or more persons repeatedly and over time against an individual who is unable to protect oneself (Olweus, 1999; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Bullying has been associated with both verbal and physical behaviors including punching, kicking, hitting, teasing, threatening and taunting (Rigby, 1997). In addition, bullying includes a power and strength imbalance between the victim and the perpetrator (Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007).

Beginning in the early 2000s, a new form of bullying emerged which is referred to as cyberbullying. Computers have enabled bullies to not only engage in verbal bullying through face-to-face confrontation, but also through the Internet where there is a much greater opportunity for anonymity. The sudden increase of juveniles who use mobile devices and computers has also contributed to this new era of bullying (Slonje & Smith, 2008).

Cyberbullying is still new to lawmakers, school administrators and researchers; therefore, little research has been done on this topic and many states and schools have not adopted cyberbullying policies.

Although there are numerous ways to define cyberbullying, most definitions have key similarities. Bill Belsey (2013), who created www.bullying.org and www.cyberbullying.ca
defined cyberbullying as, “…the use of information and communication technologies such as e-mail, cell phone, and pages text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal Web sites, and defamatory online personal polling Web sites to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others.” Perhaps the simplest definition of cyberbullying, provided by Patchin and Hinduja (2006, p. 152), states cyberbullying is “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text.”

It is important to note the term bullying most commonly refers to behavior involving adolescents within an elementary, middle, or high school setting. When referring to adults who engage in similar behavior, the term used is typically harassment (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Although harassment is usually associated with adults, juveniles, if considered old enough, can also be criminally liable for violating statutes that forbid behaviors similar to harassment (Stewart & Fritsch, 2011). It is still important to note, even though cyberbullying can inflict potentially life-threatening harm to individuals, it is not always considered equivalent to criminal behaviors already defined by current laws. The definition of cyberbullying has many commonalities with other forms of online deviance, such as online sexual harassment and cyberstalking (McQuade, Colt, & Meyer, 2009). This overlap could potentially lead to issues for law enforcement and the courts because one particular act of deviance could be classified under other forms of deviance.

Despite the increase in the number of juveniles using the Internet and the increase in physical harm done to individuals from cyberbullying, little research has been conducted on this subject. Even though instances of cyberbullying are appearing more frequently in the media, parents and their children still experience difficulties in their quest to receive justice. For example, in 2003, two 13-year-olds, a boy from Vermont and a girl from Missouri, committed
suicide after being victims of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Koloff, 2008). In 2006, a 14-year-old boy in Canada dropped out of school and began psychiatric counseling because his classmates repeatedly posted a video of him on the Internet performing a light saber scene from the Star Wars movie with a golf ball retriever (BBC News, 2006).

In 2010, three teenagers committed suicide due to a cyberbullying incident. A girl named Phoebe Prince committed suicide after being repeatedly cyberbullied online and at school (Kennedy, 2010). She experienced harassment through social networking sites and text messages. After taking her own life, her perpetrators mocked her death on Facebook. The nine perpetrators were later arrested and charged with violations ranging from harassment to violations of civil rights. The second teenager who committed suicide was Tyler Clementi. Clementi’s roommate and hall mate posted a video of Clementi and another man having sexual relations (Friedman, 2010). Both the roommate and hall mate were charged with invasion of privacy. Lastly, a 15-year-old student was victimized when his peers posted insulting comments on a website he had created to promote his acting and singing talents (CNN, 2010). In this case, the student’s father sued the six perpetrators, including their parents, and won the case.

Another potential problem for lawmakers, school administrators and law enforcement is many states have not reached a consensus regarding significant civil and constitutional rights issues. While school administrators are obligated to take action when bullying or cyberbullying occurs, many school administrators fear they will exceed their legal boundaries (Willard, 2007). Cyberbullying laws also create potential problems with violating an individual’s First Amendment right to freedom of speech. For example, many students are suing school districts for violating their First Amendment rights due to a cyberbullying incident (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). The lack of attention to solving this problem has become a serious issue and needs to be
addressed in order for a solution to be created. This study aims to contribute to the current literature by conducting a nation-wide study, which focuses on community attitudes of current cyberbullying laws and whether or not those laws infringe upon individuals’ First Amendment rights.

b. Prevalence of Cyberbullying

Current literature on cyberbullying shows a significant number of adolescents are either perpetrators or victims of cyberbullying. According to Jaishankar and Shariff (2008), 13 million teenagers in the United States, ages 6-17 years, have been victims of cyberbullying, and one-third of all teenagers and one-sixth of all pre-teens have been threatened or embarrassed through the Internet. Research has also shown the prevalence of cyberbullying around the world. Kraft (2006) summarized trends of cyberbullying around the globe and found victimization reports were between 10% and 40%. Kraft (2006) also found the most popular method of cyberbullying in the United Kingdom and Australia was through the use of a cell phone, while in the United States and Canada, the preferred method was the Internet. In a study conducted by Patchin and Hinduja (2006), approximately 29% of the youths stated they were victims of cyberbullying, and 11% reported having bullied others while on the Internet. Another study of 177 seventh-grade students from Canada found approximately 25% of the students had been victims of cyberbullying (Li, 2005). The first part of the Youth Internet Survey, conducted by Ybarra and Mitchell (2004), surveyed 1,501 adolescents, ages 10-17, regarding their online behavior. They found that 12% had engaged in cyberbullying, 4% had been victims of cyberbullying, and 3% were both cyberbullies and had been victims of cyberbullying (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). The findings from these studies show the prevalence of cyberbullying varies depending upon the
Gender and age are important elements in understanding the prevalence of cyberbullying. Though literature on gender differences regarding cyberbullying victimization is filled with inconsistent findings, age plays a much different role. According to the findings from a meta-synthesis most research found age is “curvilinearly related to the frequency of victimization, with its peak at around seventh and eighth grade” (Tokunaga, 2010, p. 280). Altogether, the findings indicate most cyberbullying happens in middle school among both females and males. Another study regarding cyberbullying victimization revealed gender disparities among a random sample of 2,162 females and 2,212 males. The three areas that revealed the biggest disparities were: 1) mean comment posted about a person on the Internet (10.5% for males and 18.2% for females), 2) victimization at some point in the person’s lifetime (16.6% for males and 25.1% for females), and 3) admitted to perpetrating a cyberbullying incident at some point in the person’s lifetime (17.5% for males and 21.3% for females); (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010b, p. 1).

Additional research on gender and cyberbullying reveals important findings. Hinduja and Patchin (2008) found that about 18% of the boys in their study reported being perpetrators of online harassment, while only 16% of the girls in their study reported being perpetrators. Similar to Hinduja and Patchin’s findings, Li (2005) found that the boys in their study (52%) were more likely to be perpetrators of cyberbullying and the girls in their study (60%) were more likely to be victims of cyberbullying. However, research shows the relationship between gender and the type of cyberbullying experience depends upon age. The Rochester Institute of Technology’s Survey of Internet and At-Risk Behaviors conducted a study including 40,000 students from kindergarten to high school in 14 different counties in New York. The study discovered that
boys begin engaging in cyberbullying behaviors at an earlier age than girls, but once they begin middle school girls report being perpetrators of cyberbullying more often. Once boys enter their teenage years they report higher rates of initiating cyberbullying (McQuade & Sampat, 2008).

Though some research suggests boys are more likely to be cyberbullies and girls are more likely to be victims of cyberbullying, other research is inconsistent. According to Slonje and Smith (2008), numerous studies have not examined gender differences and the studies that did report on gender differences revealed discrepancies. For instance, Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, and Tippett (2006) discovered that girls are more likely to be victims of cyberbullying than boys. On the other hand, Li (2006) found no gender differences for being a victim of cyberbullying. Similar to Li, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) found no gender differences for perpetrators and victims of cyberbullying. These discrepancies reveal the need for more research on gender and age in relation to the type of cyberbullying incident.

c. Traditional Bullies versus Cyberbullies

Although both traditional bullying and cyberbullying contain aggression, there are important differences to consider when studying this topic. With traditional bullying, which usually includes yelling, kicking or punching, there is normally a strength or power imbalance between the victim and the aggressor (Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002; Wolak et al., 2007). This means the aggressor is usually a physically stronger person or someone with a higher social class than the victim. On the other hand, cyberbullies may be of any physically stature or social class; meaning weaker or lower class individuals might also be the aggressor (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). While the strength and power imbalance apparent in traditional bullying poses certain risks to the victim, the accessibility of the victim to cyberbullies makes cyberbullying a more pervasive problem.
The accessibility of the Internet in the United States has made it easier for bullies to attack their victims from anywhere and at any time of the day. The Internet has increased the number of avenues through which an aggressor can attack his or her victim and has perhaps created bigger problems for victims. According to Lenhart, Madden, Smith, and Macgill (2007), 93% of teens access the Internet. Teens also send more text messages than the average cell phone subscriber. Yen (2009) found the average cell phone subscriber sends 407 text messages per month while the average teen sends 2,000 text messages per month. Traditional incidents of bullying usually exist while the victim is at school and stops when the victim returns home.

Another important distinction between these two types of bullying is the absence of visibility in cyberbullying. Even though it is common for victims of cyberbullying to know their aggressor (Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009), the aspect of anonymity that exists with cyberbullying may prevent victims from knowing the aggressor (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). Other researchers found similar findings which indicated that, although 40-50% of the victims of cyberbullying know their aggressor (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Wolak et al., 2007), the anonymity aspect of cyberbullying decreases the chances of the cyberbully being caught, ends in harm without interacting in person, and involves little preparation (Englander & Muldowney, 2007). Anonymity enables adolescents who would not typically engage in traditional bullying to do so electronically. The absence of visibility also creates further issues, for instance, an individual may take a comment on their Facebook© seriously when the person who posted the comment intended for the statement to be a joke. In addition, a person who posts an insulting comment on someone’s Facebook© may not see the pain they caused the other person. This would not be an issue in traditional bullying where the aggressor is clearly known, sarcasm is more obvious, and the pain the victim experiences is easily noticed.
Researchers have also pointed out the key similarities between traditional bullying and cyberbullying. According to Williams and Guerra (2007), individuals who engage in cyberbullying are also likely to engage in traditional bullying. Other researchers found 36% of children in their national sample experience both traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007). Juvoven and Gross (2008) found 85% of adolescents in their study were victimized both at school and online. This means youth may not only be victims of bullying at school, but also cyberbullying at home. Aggressors who bully their peers both at school and at home may enhance the effects on the victim causing increased psychological harm.

Cyberbullies tend to have difficulties in school (Beran & Li, 2007) and tend to be more aggressive (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Like cyberbullies, traditional bullies also tend to be more aggressive (Craig, 1998) and also have difficulties doing well in school (Andreou, 2001). Bartlett and Gentile (2012) provide a good example of the similarities of traditional bullying versus cyberbullying. While a bully might reject a victim from being part of a peer group on the playground, a cyberbully might do the same by, for instance, not inviting a certain person to join a Facebook group. Overall, the accessibility, lack of supervision and anonymity of the Internet creates the potential for long-lasting and severe distress. The following chapter argues cyberbullies are able to create more psychosocial distress than traditional bullies because of the convenience of the Internet.
CHAPTER 3
PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF CYBERBULLYING

The disruptions in an individual’s life resulting from cyberbullying can be detrimental to a person’s mental health. The amount of psychosocial distress experienced by an individual often depends on the amount of time, frequency and the gravity of the incident. One minor incident of cyberbullying is a lot less likely to cause serious distress on an individual than numerous incidents of cyberbullying. For instance, if a cyberbully posts a mean comment on a victim’s Facebook©, it may be easier to ignore than if a cyberbully posts an embarrassing picture of the victim on numerous others’ Facebook© walls. Empirical research exists on psychosocial problems, academic performance, and family relationships of individuals who have been victimized by a cyberbully (Tokunaga, 2010).

Many studies have shown that victims of cyberbullying often report academic problems as a result of a cyberbullying incident. Research on cyberbullying victimization has revealed students report a decrease in their grades (Beran & Li, 2007), more absences (Katzer, Fetchenhauer, & Belschak, 2009), and sudden feelings that school is unsafe (Varjas, Henrich, & Meyers, 2009). Ybarra, Diener-West, and Leaf (2007) also found victims of cyberbullying often skip class and carry weapons on school grounds, which leads to increased detentions and suspensions. Some researchers have attributed these behaviors to poor concentration and high frustration resulting from being cyberbullied (Beran & Li, 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Patchin and Hinduja (2006) also found one-fourth of victims of cyberbullying feel like their life at home has changed from the incident.
In 2006, Patchin and Hinduja conducted a study, which revealed 32% of students who had been victims of cyberbullying said the incident affected their performance at school. Other researchers found certain aspects of cyberbullying to be more devastating than traditional bullying (Brown, Jackson, & Cassidy, 2006; Campbell, 2005). The first aspect mentioned was the ability to save the insulting comments and revisit them frequently, causing more psychological distress each time. Brown et al. (2006) also mentioned the potential for negative consequences demonstrated by numerous suicides and school dropouts related to cyberbullying. Additionally, the Internet increases the number of people who see the insulting comment, leading to increased embarrassment. Some cyberbullies remain anonymous to the victim, which can increase the amount of fear and anxiety experienced by the victim and lead to decreased trust in others (Campbell, 2005).

A study conducted by Patchin and Hinduja (2010) of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders from 30 different middle schools revealed a correlation between cyberbullying and lower self-esteem even when controlling for certain demographics. According to Patchin and Hinduja’s (2010) study, 18.3% of respondents reported having “received an upsetting e-mail from someone you know” (p. 618). 16% reported having “received an instant message that made you upset” (p. 618). 14.2% reported having "had something posted on your MySpace that made you upset” (p. 618). Lastly, 5.7% stated that they felt frightened to access a computer. Of the 9 types of cyberbullying Patchin and Hinduja (2010) included in their survey, 30% of respondents reported victimization by one or more of the nine types twice or more times in the past 30 days.

In addition to cyberbullying victimization, Patchin and Hinduja (2010) examined cyberbullying offending rates. Their findings revealed the most common form of cyberbullying offense, which 23.1% of respondents admitted to perpetrating, was “posting something online
about another person to make others laugh” (p. 618). Respondents also admitted to sending text messages through the computer (13.7%) or by e-mail (9.1%) in order to embarrass the other person or to upset them. Similar to the cyberbullying victimization findings, 22% of respondents confessed to engaging in “one or more of the 5 behaviors at least 2 or more times in the previous 30 days” (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010, p. 618). Patchin and Hinduja (2010) also ran an OLS regression analysis, which revealed both cyberbullies and victims of cyberbullying have significantly lower self-esteem than individuals who are not cyberbullies or victims of cyberbullying. The results were still true even when controlling for age, race, and gender. These results show the prevalence of cyberbullying and further emphasize the need to help children being victimized. Lower self-esteem is commonly associated with depression, which often leads to suicide (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, Vohs, 2003). If school officials fail to help victims of cyberbullying it could cause these individuals serious psychological issues.

Another study conducted by Hinduja and Patchin (2007) examined the relationship between offline problem behaviors, strain and cyberbullying victimization. They found a significant relationship between offline problem behaviors and strain. In addition, their study revealed that strain facilitates the association between offline problem behaviors and cyberbullying victimization because cyberbullying victimization on offline problem behaviors can be due to strain.

Offline problem behaviors were measured using an eleven-item index denoting different behaviors respondents had engaged in within the past six months of completing the survey. The behaviors ranged from petty types of deviance (e.g., skipped school without an excuse) to more serious types of deviance (e.g., assaulted adult). The most common type of offline problem behavior was drinking liquor (33.6%) and the least common type of offline problem behavior
was being sent home from school (4.5%). Strain was measured using a scale with nine items ranging from being treated unfairly to being a victim of a crime. The most common type of strain experienced was being treating unfairly (66.7%) and the least common type of strain experienced was having been a victim of a crime (11.0%).

Cyberbullying victimization was measured using a scale with eight types of victimization experiences, such as being ignored by others and being disrespected by others (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). The most common type of cyberbullying victimization experienced was being ignored by others (43.2%) and the least common type of cyberbullying victimization experienced was scared for safety (4.8%). The results also revealed more females (36.3%) are victims of cyberbullying than males (32.4%). The majority of male and female respondents experienced cyberbullying victimization in a chat room (47.7%) or by computer text message (37.4%). Patchin and Hinduja (2007) also asked respondents questions pertaining to their emotional responses after being victimized. Out of the 468 respondents, 30.6% felt angry, 34.0% were frustrated, 21.8% were sad, and 35.0% were not bothered by the victimization. It could be possible that the respondents who were not bothered had experienced a petty type of victimization.

According to a study conducted by Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007), 93% of respondents who said they were victims of cyberbullying also stated cyberbullying affected them in a negative way. The respondents said they frequently felt sad, depressed, or hopeless and did not feel comfortable going to school. Another study revealed that out of all respondents who were cyberbullied, 38% stated they were emotionally distraught because of being victimized by a cyberbully (Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2006). Victims reportedly have used different coping mechanisms to deal with cyberbullies (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). The most
common responses were telling an online friend, telling the bully to stop and leaving the environment.

Victims of cyberbullying are not the only individuals who suffer from psychosocial problems. Ybarra et al. (2006) found cyberbullies are more likely to suffer from psychosocial problems than victims of cyberbullying. Cyberbullies reportedly experienced more substance abuse, physical aggression and sexual aggression. Cyberbullies are also said to be perpetrators of traditional bullying, associated with other delinquent peers, react with anger and have weak emotional ties with family (Ybarra et al., 2006). Additionally, their parents are less likely to supervise their daily activities when compared to adolescents not involved in cyberbullying.
CHAPTER 4

LEGAL ISSUES WITH CYBERBULLYING

a. Current Laws

School administrators and law enforcement officials are tasked with providing fair consequences to individuals who engage in cyberbullying while trying to safeguard themselves from any civil liability, and to protect First Amendment rights. This can be difficult when most laws concerning cyberbullying are constantly evolving and many states have not reached a consensus regarding significant civil and constitutional rights issues. Federal and state governments in the United States currently enforce laws against harassment, discrimination and civil rights, however only thirty states have anticyberbullying laws (Ho, 2012). Enacting laws to combat this type of behavior can be challenging for policymakers due to individuals First Amendment rights. The primary goal of school administrators is to provide a safe learning environment where their students are able to thrive (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). They are responsible for preventing and responding to all forms of harassment that occur on school grounds, but cyberbullying has presented a whole new problem because of its accessibility off campus. Although many individuals believe it should be the parent’s responsibility to provide consequences to their children for their behavior outside of school, others argue in favor of school intervention outside of school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011).

In addition to school intervention outside of school, another problem arises regarding school administrators boundaries when it comes to freedom of speech. Many people debate
whether or not school administrators should have the authority to constrain student expressions and have the discretion to punish students for speech considered inappropriate (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). Without clearer principles for the authority to control online speech, school administrators and policymakers risk denying a student’s First Amendment right to freedom of speech. While some states have dealt with cases pertaining to cyberbullying, the Supreme Court has not yet confronted the problems that arise from student speech online.

Another potential problem when addressing cyberbullying is that each state’s definition of cyberbullying varies. What one state legislature may consider cyberbullying another state may not. There is not one cohesive definition of cyberbullying, which can make things confusing for school administrators and parents when trying to determine what to do about a cyberbullying incident. Of the thirty states that explicitly address cyberbullying in their bullying law, only six actually use and describe the term “cyberbullying.” Nevada’s bullying law defines cyberbullying as “bullying through the use of electronic communication” (Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann § 388.122, 2010). Similarly, Oregon defines cyberbullying as “the use of any electronic communication device to harass, intimidate, or bully” (ORS § 339.351, 2010). The other four states, which explicitly define cyberbullying, provide a more detailed description. For example, Louisiana law (R.S. 17:416.13, 2010) defines cyberbullying as:

harassment, intimidation, or bullying of a student on school property by another student using a computer mobile phone, or other interactive or digital technology or harassment, intimidation, or bullying of a student while off school property by another student using any such means when the action or actions are intended to have an effect on the student when the student is on school property.
Massachusetts’s law (ALM GL ch. 71, § 370, 2010) uses the most specific definition of cyberbullying:

…bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but shall not be limited to, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photo electronic or photo optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages, or facsimile communications.

Cyber-bullying shall also include (i) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or (ii) the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages … Cyber-bullying shall also include the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons…

Twenty-four states do not mention the term cyberbullying in their bullying law, but instead note bullying includes electronic communications or acts. Many state laws also define bullying as a phenomenon that only occurs on school grounds. Numerous laws fail to mention that the occurrence of cyberbullying off campus presents a problem because many incidents of cyberbullying do not occur on school grounds. If state laws do not include cyberbullying that occurs off campus then it is difficult for educators and law enforcement to legally know how to handle incidents that occur off campus.

b. First Amendment Rights Issues

Student’s rights to free speech were first addressed in the case of Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District (1969). In this particular case, three students were suspended for wearing black armbands to school, which symbolized their protest of the Vietnam
War (Hinduja and Patchin, 2011). The court ruled the suspensions violated the student’s right to freedom of speech as granted by the First Amendment of the Constitution because “it can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate” (Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 1969). The court believed student speech should only be punished if it meets the “material and substantial interference standard,” meaning the speech interrupts classwork or involves a considerable amount of disorder or invasion of others rights (Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 1969).

The Tinker decision was revisited 17 years later in Bethel School District v. Fraser (1986). Matthew Fraser took legal action against the Bethel School District because he had been suspended for making a sexually explicit speech at a school assembly in attempt to nominate a friend for student body vice president (Bethel School District v. Fraser, 1986). The court took a different approach from the Tinker case, stating the school administrators should be able to censor the student’s speech in order to promote “socially appropriate behavior” (Bethel School District v. Fraser, 1986). The Fraser Court was more concerned with adhering to the school’s educational mission than protecting the student’s right to freedom of speech. Therefore extremely offensive or hostile language communicated through the Internet may be restricted due to the Fraser ruling.

A more recent case involving racial tensions at a Tennessee high school initiated an appellate court to revisit the Tinker decision. Students at the high school wore tee shirts with the confederate flag displayed (Barr v. Lafon, 2007). The principal told the students they would be suspended if they did not remove the shirts or cover up the confederate flag, which caused the students to take legal action because they felt their free speech rights were being violated. The
court believed the tee shirts might prompt conflicts similar to what they had previously experienced. The court also mentioned that the school had asked law enforcement to aid them in maintaining order on campus because of the racial conflict and violence. Though the lower court agreed with the students, the appellate court decided the school could in fact restrict the speech because the school established the possibility of material interference through the violence and racial tensions that had been occurring.

Another recent case shows how much authority schools have off campus. In 2002, a school in Juneau, Alaska let students leave class to attend the Winter Olympics torch relay (Hinduja and Patchin, 2011). Students and other citizens were on both sides of the street as the torch went through the town. One of the students, Joseph Frederick, held a sign that read, “BONG HiTS 4 JESUS” (Hinduja and Patchin, 2011, p. 73). Although the students were not on school property, the principal of the school noticed the incident and confiscated the sign, suspending Frederick for 10 days. Immediately following his suspension, Frederick sued the school and in 2007 the U.S. Supreme Court heard his case. The conclusion of the U.S. Supreme Court was Frederick’s right to freedom of speech was not violated. First, the court asserted the sign was shown during a school event, which deemed the phrase “school speech” rather than speech protected by Frederick’s First Amendment right (Morse v. Frederick, 2007). Second, the sign may be seen as promoting illegal drugs because it made reference to illegal drug use. Lastly, the court held that the government and schools are responsible for deterring illegal drug use. Overall, the court believed the school had the authority to discipline the student’s speech because the incident occurred at an off campus school event.

Hinduja and Patchin (2011) concluded educators are able to restrict student’s speech and discipline them for speech deemed inappropriate or behavior that triggers a substantial disruption
at school (*Tinker*), violation of student’s freedom of speech right (*Tinker*), or does not support the school’s educational mission (*Fraser and Morse*). One question still left unanswered is whether school administrators are able to discipline students for inappropriate speech or behavior that occurs off school grounds. This question is especially pertinent when discussing cyberbullying because most incidents of cyberbullying occur off school grounds in cyber space.

Numerous issues arise when discussing a school’s authority to control a student’s speech off-campus. These cases show even though students have the right to free speech on campus and off-campus, their free speech rights can be more easily controlled when on campus. Though none of the cases discussed in this section involved online communication, they do show how the issues previously discussed can be related to current problems educators are facing with technology on campus and off-campus. With that being said, some examples of cases involving electronic harassment are now discussed.

c. Electronic Harassment and Schools

In 1998 a high school student in Marble Hill, Missouri, was suspended for 10 days because he had created a Web site from his home that degraded the school’s administration using vulgar language (*Beussink v. Woodland R-IV School District*, 1998). Soon after his suspension, the student sued the school district for violating his First Amendment rights. The U.S. District Court agreed his First Amendment rights were violated and the suspension was considered unconstitutional since the school district was unable to prove that the speech created a substantial disruption of activities within the school environment. It was further shown that the school administrators could not discipline a student for speech with which they did not agree or which they found unpleasant. Rather, the court agreed the speech must cause a substantial disruption for school administrators to justify intervention.
Another case involving electronic harassment is consistent with the *Tinker* ruling. The U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington applied the “off-campus speech approach” in *Emmett v. Kent School District No. 415* (2000). The case involved a high school student who created a Web site called, “unofficial Kentlake High Home Page” (Hinduja and Patchin, 2011, p. 74). The Web site included fake obituaries of students and enabled individuals who visited the site to vote on “who should die next” (Hinduja and Patchin, 2011, p. 74). After school administrators learned of this student’s behavior they placed the student on emergency expulsion, which was later reduced to a 5-day suspension. The U.S. District Court ruled the school had exceeded their authority because the Web site was not created on school grounds and the student did not use the computers provided by the school to create the site. Overall, the court held that the Web site did not threaten anyone and was not violent. Due to the court’s ruling, the school could not control the student’s speech because it occurred off-campus and, the school administrators were unable to show that anyone mentioned on the site felt endangered or intimidated. Both the *Beussink* and *Emmett* cases rejected the *Fraser* ruling because the court did not feel the students caused a substantial disruption to the school environment.

A more recent example involves an eighth-grader who was cyberbullied when her peers posted a video on YouTube displaying her as a “slut,” “spoiled,” and “a brat” (*J.C. v. Beverly Hills Unified School District*, 2009). The student went to the school counselor because she felt humiliated and unable to attend class. The counselor then notified school administrators and school district attorneys who categorized the behavior as cyberbullying. With the collaboration of the school administrators and the school district attorneys, the perpetrator was suspended for 2 days. The perpetrator’s parents then decided to sue the school district because they felt their child’s First Amendment rights were violated. The federal judge in this case stated that the
school administrators exceeded their authority because they were unable to prove that the speech caused a substantial disruption to the school environment. The judge asserted, “the court cannot uphold school discipline of student speech simply because young persons are unpredictable or immature or because, in general, teenagers are emotionally fragile and may often fight over hurtful comments” (J.C. v. Beverly Hills Unified School District, 2009). The cases previously mentioned show the decision made by the court lies in the discretion of the judge and, without clearer guidelines on how to handle these situations, many schools and students will continue to battle with how to handle the negative effects resulting from cyberbullying.

Now, situations in which the court justified school intervention are considered. These cases involve incidents that occurred off-campus, but were unmistakably threatening to staff or students, causing distress and disruption to the learning process and school environment. One well-known incident occurred when a student created a Web site, which contained offensive and threatening speech about an English teacher (J.S. v. Bethlehem Area School District, 2000). The remarks included inappropriate references to the teacher’s body weight, personality, why the teacher should die, and why she should be fired. The student also listed a suggested price on the Web site to help him hire a hitman. The teacher, Kathleen Fulmer, stated the incident brought serious distress to her life that introduced health problems, psychological problems, and caused her to quit teaching for the rest of the school year. The school district also asserted that the Web site had a demoralizing effect within the school environment causing staff and students to feel helpless. These factors caused the court to uphold the expulsion of the student and Fulmer ended up suing the family of the student in civil court.

Another case in which a court upheld school intervention was in the case of Wisniewski v. Board of Education of the Weedsport Central School District in 2007. An eighth-grader named
Aaron Wisniewski created a graphic picture of his teacher’s head being shot with a gun. Along with the picture, Wisniewski added text that said, “Kill Mr. Vandermolen” (Wisniewski v. Board of Education of the Weedsport Central School District, 2007). Wisniewski then sent the picture to a group of his friends who then forwarded the picture to other individuals. Once the teacher and the principal of the school learned of this incident, the principal suspended the student, which impelled the parents of Wisniewski to file a lawsuit. Unhappy with the lower courts decision to side with the school district, Wisniewski’s parents appealed the case to a higher court. The U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the lower courts decision because they believed the picture signified a threat to the teacher’s life and the student should have realized it would cause a substantial disruption to the schools learning environment (Wisniewski v. Board of Education of the Weedsport Central School District, 2007).

Perhaps the most controversial case occurred in 2006 when a student created a fake MySpace profile mocking the school principal (Layshock v. Hermitage School District, 2006). The profile was created at the student’s grandmother’s home and was not threatening to the principal. The court asserted the First Amendment safeguarded creating the MySpace page, but the school district gained the authority to punish the student when it generated a disruption to the school environment. Students continually accessed the MySpace® page causing the school to shut down its entire computer system for 5 days. In addition, numerous staff dedicated their time to this problem, which could otherwise have been spent educating students. Several classes had to be cancelled and students were unable to access the school computers. Due to these factors the lower court held the school district could in fact demonstrate a substantial disruption, therefore upholding the school’s decision to take disciplinary action.
A year later, a federal district judge asserted the punishment violated the student’s First Amendment rights (Layshock v. Hermitage School District, 2007). His argument was based on the fact that other MySpace pages had been created of the school principal and it is impossible to determine which page led to the disruption, if any at all. After further investigation, the court found the disruption did not violate the school’s educational mission nor was the disruption substantial. The court explicitly stated, “[t]he mere fact that the Internet may be accessed at school does not authorize school officials to become censors of the World Wide Web. Public schools are vital institutions, but their reach is not unlimited” (Layshock v. Hermitage School District, 2007).

As seen in the previous examples, schools have to be careful not to overstep their boundaries when disciplining students for behavior that occurs off-campus. Though some schools have been successful in court, many end up being sued by families for violating their child’s First Amendment rights. Without better guidelines and policies on how to handle these incidents, many schools will continue to battle whether or not they should discipline a student for online behavior that occurs off-campus. In addition, the decision often lies in the discretion of the judge and, with no clear consensus on how to handle these issues, many judges’ decisions differ though the incidents may be similar. Overall, the previous cases show intervention is appropriate in certain circumstances, especially those that impede the schools educational mission, use school computers, threaten staff or students or substantially disrupt the school environment.

d. Fourth Amendment Rights Issues

Another issue regarding an individual’s constitutional rights is whether a school should have the authority to examine a student’s Internet history for cyberbullying and other speech
deemed inappropriate. Monitoring students’ Internet histories may be a potential way to address cyberbullying, but according to the Fourth Amendment school administrators would be violating students’ rights against an unreasonable search and seizure. There have been several instances where school administrators have overstepped their boundaries regarding the Fourth Amendment. In the next paragraph a few examples where Fourth Amendment rights were applied in a court case are provided.

In 1985 an assistant vice principal searched a student’s purse and found marijuana and proof to assume the student also participated in drug dealing (New Jersey v. T.L.O, 1985). The Supreme Court ruled teachers or other school staff may search a student only if there is reasonable suspicion the student has violated a school rule or a law and only if the search is conducted without being excessively intrusive due to the student’s sex, age, or nature of the violation. Since the Court’s ruling, many schools have adopted search and seizure policies for students’ lockers and desks. Generally, the policies state that students should expect little privacy in their desks and lockers because there will be general inspections on a random basis (Willard, 2006). Willard (2006) also mentions the same standards can be used when referring to Internet history and computer files.

In 2006, a teacher at a Pennsylvania school seized a student’s cell phone because the student violated the school’s policy, which prohibited students from having their cell phones displayed during class (Klump v. Nazareth Area School District, 2006). A school administrator then looked through the student’s text messages, contact list and voicemail. The student then sued the school district because the student felt the search was unreasonable. A federal court then determined, though the school district had reasonable suspicion of a school policy violation, it did not have reasonable suspicion to believe any other school policy or law was violated;
therefore, the search of the student’s cell phone was not justified and was considered unconstitutional.
CHAPTER 5
THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

In the current study, Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1975) theory of planned behavior was applied to community attitudes of cyberbullying. This theory helped explain how individuals form their opinions toward cyberbullying. Leonard Doob (1947) defined attitude as an implicit preemptive response, which exists unconsciously (May & Doob, 1937). Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) defined attitude as an individual’s positive or negative feeling toward an object. Numerous researchers have asserted that attitudes are “evaluative summaries” (Fazio, 1989, p. 155), and are essential when trying to comprehend and predict an individual’s behavior and decision-making process (Allport, 1935; Myers, 1990).

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) explained attitude change using an expectancy-value model known as the reasoned action model. Their model contained three main factors, “attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms and perceptions of behavioral control” (Ajzen Albarracin, & Hornik, 2007, p. 7). According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), individuals’ attitudes regarding a particular object are determined according to their key beliefs concerning the object. They define a belief as the subjective likelihood that the object has a particular attribute. In this context, the words “object” and “attribute” refer to any distinguishable facet of an individual’s life (Ajzen et al., 2007). In other words, the object is a certain action and attributes are the action’s expected results. For instance, an individual may believe drinking wine (the attitude object) slows down the aging process (the attribute).
According to the reasoned action model, an individual’s attitude toward engaging in a certain behavior is dependent upon the subjective values or estimations of the results correlated with the behavior and according to the strength of these correlations (Ajzen et al., 2007). Basically, the theory of planned behavior assumes individuals’ social behaviors result from the knowledge or beliefs that individuals acquire regarding the behavior being considered. Individuals form these beliefs through numerous avenues such as the media, radio, newspapers, formal education, the Internet and personal experiences. Overall, Fishbein and Ajzen’s model reveals beliefs are presumed to create attitudes, subjective standards, and opinions of control when talking about the behavior and, consequently, guide the creation of behavioral intentions and the presentation of the behavior (Ajzen et al., 2007).

Figure 1.
In addition to discussing the reasoned action model, attitude formation will be considered. Fishbein and Azjen (1975) included attitude formation in their conceptual framework in order to explain how a person forms beliefs about a particular object and concurrently develops an attitude regarding that object. For example, think about a person who has a neutral attitude regarding a stranger because he or she has no prior knowledge about the stranger. The person eventually learns the stranger is a supporter of the Republican Party. Assuming the person has a positive attitude toward supporters of the Republican Party, we can assume the person will form a positive attitude concerning the stranger. Further reinforcement of the positive attitude may occur when the person learns the stranger supports a balanced budget and less government. This example shows individuals form attitudes based on their shared beliefs.

The reasoned action model and the formation of attitudes help explain how individuals may form their opinions when answering questions regarding cyberbullying. Each individual’s answers may vary depending upon their background factors: dispositions (e.g., personality traits, global attitudes, intelligence), demographics (e.g., age, gender, education, religion), and information (e.g., experience, knowledge, media exposure); (Ajzen et al., 2007). When analyzing the data in the current study, respondents’ attitudes and beliefs regarding cyberbullying were ascertained according to their responses. Their attitudes and beliefs will then suggest their future intentions and behaviors. When discussing cyberbullying, it is important to know individuals’ attitudes concerning current laws and policies because people are the ones who create and enforce the laws.
CHAPTER 6
THE CURRENT STUDY

This chapter specifies the research questions and specific aims related to community attitudes of cyberbullying. The literature review revealed many gaps in prior research. Many studies also revealed inconsistent findings regarding age and sex. Though some research suggests boys are more likely to be cyberbullies and girls are more likely to be victims of cyberbullying, other research presents difficult findings (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, & Tippett, 2006). Li (2006) found no gender differences for being a victim of cyberbullying. Similar to Li, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) found no gender differences for perpetrators and victims of cyberbullying. In addition, Wolak (2007) asserted that perpetrators and victims of cyberbullying are usually the same age. Overall, these discrepancies reveal the need for more research on gender and age in relation to the type of cyberbullying incident.

Previous research on perceptions of child pornography offenders suggests that age and sex have an impact on individual’s perceptions regarding certain hypothetical scenarios (Lam, Mitchell, & Seto, 2010). In addition, Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1975) theory of planned behavior further demonstrates how individuals dispositions, demographics, and media exposure have an impact on their attitudes. Zilney and Zilney (2009) found that media reports have an impact on individual’s attitudes towards sex offenders. While rates of sexual violence have decreased in the U.S. and Canada, individuals feel a sense of heightened danger due to sensationalized media reports. This finding shows how media exposure can impact individual’s attitudes towards
certain criminal behaviors; therefore this study includes items measuring respondent’s media exposure. Based on prior research, this research explored the following research questions:

Q1: Are community attitudes of cyberbullying biased based on the varying victim characteristics (e.g., sex and age)?

Q2: Are community attitudes of cyberbullying different according to the type of cyberbullying incident (e.g., YouTube video)?

Q3: Are community attitudes of cyberbullying different according to type and frequency of media exposure?

Q4: Are community attitudes of cyberbullying different according to individual’s cognitive dispositions?

Q5: How do individuals feel about a cyberbully’s right to freedom of speech?

Q6: Are parents more sensitive to victims of cyberbullying?

This chapter starts off by stating the research hypotheses for this study followed by the description of the operational definition of constructs. The operational definition of constructs section operationally defines and explains the methods used to measure the independent and dependent variables for this study. In addition, population of interest and sampling methods for this Internet-based research design are discussed.

a. Research Hypotheses

As previously discussed, no prior research has investigated community attitudes toward cyberbullying. Thus, the intent of this study was to examine whether the sex, age, type of cyberbullying incident, media exposure, and personality differences have an impact on community attitudes of cyberbullying.

The following five hypotheses were tested in the current study:
H₁: The characteristics (age, sex) of cyberbullying victims will influence the respondent's level of sensitivity in each Vignette (1, 2, & 3).

H₁.a. Respondent’s will be more sensitive towards female victims and younger victims when compared to male victims and older victims.

H₂: Parenthood will influence the respondent’s level of sensitivity in each Vignette (1, 2, & 3).

H₂.a. Respondent’s who have children will be more sensitive towards victims of cyberbullying compared to respondents without children.

H₃: Cognitive disposition differences between respondents will affect their sensitivity levels in each Vignette (1, 2, & 3).

H₄: Respondents’ exposure to media will be related to differences in sensitivity levels.

H₄.a. Respondent’s who view two or more hours of media a day will be more sensitive towards the victim in each vignette.

H₅: Male respondents who strongly believe in First Amendment rights to freedom of speech will have a higher level of agreement with the First Amendment rights statement (I feel the child’s First Amendment rights were violated).

b. Operational Definitions of Constructs

The biographical variables or factors for this study, manipulated through different vignettes, of the portrayed cyberbully and victim in the hypothetical cyberbullying scenario varied in terms of age (younger, older), sex (male, female), and type of cyberbullying incident (e.g., YouTube video). The dependent variable for this study was community attitudes of certain hypothetical cyberbullying scenarios.
Sex. Sex (male, female) was manipulated in different vignettes concerning a particular cyberbullying incident. The sex was manipulated in order to examine whether peoples’ attitudes toward cyberbullying incidents vary depending on the sex of the victim. For instance, one vignette will talk about a younger girl who was a victim of cyberbullying and another will talk about an older boy who was a victim of cyberbullying.

Age. Age (younger, older) was manipulated in different hypothetical scenarios involving cyberbullying. The age was also manipulated in order to examine whether peoples’ attitudes toward cyberbullying incidents vary depending on the age of the victim. For instance, one vignette will talk about a younger victim of cyberbullying and another will talk about an older victim of cyberbullying.

Type of Cyberbullying Incident. Type of cyberbullying incident was measured by manipulating different vignettes to include certain types of cyberbullying (see Appendix A). For instance, one cyberbullying incident was a situation in which a cyberbully created a fake Facebook profile and another was involving a cyberbully who posted an embarrassing YouTube video of another student. The study presented three vignettes portraying different hypothetical cyberbullying scenarios.

Media Exposure. Media exposure was measured by asking questions regarding the type of media exposure and frequency of media exposure. For instance, one question asked how frequently the respondent watched the news and another question asked what news channel the respondent most frequently visited.

Cognitive Disposition. The cognitive disposition of the respondent was evaluated using the Moral Decision-Making Scale (MDKS), which concentrates on the respondents’ “moral compass,” meaning whether or not decisions are based on Hedonistic, Internal, or Social Values
(Rogers, Smoak, & Liu, 2006). The MDKS included a total of 15 items, which were scaled from 1 (not important in my decisions) to 8 (very important in my decisions) for statements such as, “if my choice could get me into trouble or not” (see Rogers et al., 2006). Using the instrument’s standardized scoring guidelines, certain items were totaled then averaged in order to score each respondent on the three decision-making values: Hedonism, Internal, and Social Values. Individuals, who are considered hedonistic, are those who strive to maximize pleasure and minimize harm. They make decisions based on whether it will be pleasurable or not. Individuals who make decisions based on their own moral beliefs have high Internal Values. Lastly, individuals who make decisions based on social norms and laws have high Social Values.

**Parenthood.** Parenthood was measured by asking respondents whether they are parents or not. The three response categories were, “Yes,” “No,” and “Decline to Respond.” This item was included on the questionnaire due to the expectation that parents are more sensitive to victims of cyberbullying when compared to those who are not parents.

**Community Attitudes.** Previous research on perceptions of child pornography offenders shows that age and sex play a role in individual’s perceptions concerning different hypothetical scenarios (Lam et al., 2010). Based on prior research, age and sex play a role in individual’s perceptions concerning cyberbullying are examined. Community attitudes, the dependent variable for this study, was measured using a Likert rating scale created for this study called Community Attitudes Toward Cyberbullying scale, which asks the respondents to rate their level of agreement or disagreement to each statement (see Appendix A). The Community Attitudes Toward Cyberbullying scale contains four categories ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). The respondents were directed to choose the best response on the scale of 1 to 4 for each item. The items were forced choice, but the respondents had the option to select,
“Decline to Respond,” to each item. An example of one item is, “The victim in this incident is too sensitive.” A Likert rating scale was chosen because it informs the researcher of the direction and intensity of the respondent’s attitude (Likert, 1932). In addition, prior studies have shown this method yields reliable results (Lam et al., 2010; Seigfried-Spellar & Rogers, 2010; Church, Wakeman, Miller, Clements, & Sun, 2008).

The Community Attitudes Toward Cyberbullying scale was pilot tested and reviewed by professionals in the field who provided feedback regarding the nature of the statements to assess both content validity and readability. The feedback received indicated the scale’s face validity, meaning whether the items seem to be measuring the underlying constructs (Nevo, 1985).
CHAPTER 7

METHODOLOGY

a. Participants

Respondents were voluntarily recruited using a snowball sample via the Internet by asking friends and family to forward the questionnaire to their friends and family. The study was also advertised using various online websites including social media websites, chat rooms, and discussion forums. The online survey was created using Qualtrics, a research-based survey website. This sampling method, referred to as snowball sampling, allowed the researcher to gather respondents from the general population of Internet users (Neuman, 2011). The study was completely anonymous; meaning no identifying information regarding the respondents (e.g., names, IP addresses) was gathered. Although the researcher did not have any face-to-face interaction with the respondents, it was possible for the respondents to contact the researcher via phone or email address in order to ask questions regarding the study, which is required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

After the respondent’s provided their consent to voluntarily participate in the study (by clicking the “I Agree” button) they were directed to a page where they were asked if they are 19 years of age or older. If the respondent indicated they were not 19 years of age or older, they were not able to complete the survey due to their status as a minor in the state of Alabama. It was mandatory for the respondents to give their consent and they were able to exit the survey at any time. At the end of the survey, respondents were directed to a page where the researcher thanked them for participating and provided contact information for further questions regarding
the study. Respondents were also notified that they would not receive compensation for participating in the survey other than the knowledge of aiding in scientific research.

b. Design & Procedure

This exploratory study was conducted online using an Internet-based survey via Qualtrics©, and respondents were solicited via different websites. A link to the survey’s webpage was displayed on social media websites, discussion forums, and chat rooms, and respondents were able to voluntarily complete the survey. This data collection method was chosen due to the accessibility of respondents and anonymity (Mueller, Jacobsen, & Schwarzer, 2000). The researcher’s email address was provided on the survey website’s consent form in order to enable respondents to contact the researcher with any questions pertaining to the study. Once the respondents accessed the website, the home page explained the purpose of the study and enabled the respondents to either Agree or Disagree to complete the survey. After clicking on the “I Agree” button respondents were taken to the first page of the survey where they were notified of the estimated time of completion. Respondents were never asked for any identifying information (e.g., name, IP addresses). In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher provided each respondent with an ID number, which could not be linked back to a certain individual. Each item on the survey provided a close-ended response category, which included a “Decline to Respond” response, as required by the IRB.

The demographic questions were placed at the beginning of the survey because research shows many respondents often drop out prior to completing the survey and the demographic questions were essential to this particular study (Teclaw, Price, & Osatuke, 2012). An example of a demographic question is, “What is your highest education level?” The respondents were then directed to three different vignettes. After reading each vignette, the respondent answered a
series of questions pertaining to the vignette. Each vignette varied based on the age and sex of
the victim and the type of cyberbullying incident. There were also items on the questionnaire
regarding community attitudes concerning the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights. An
eexample is, “I believe the student’s First Amendment rights were violated.”

According to Rosenthal and Rosnow (2009), respondents who volunteer to participate in
a study are often different from those who do not volunteer. Participants who volunteer usually
are more intelligent, have a higher educational level, higher job status, higher need for approval
and display less authoritarianism. In addition, previous research has suggested volunteers are
more inclined to be sociable, unconventional, younger and arousal seeking. Since Internet users
were targeted, the researcher may have encountered volunteer bias, meaning the sample may not
be generalizable to the entire population. However, volunteer bias is a problem for face-to-face
survey designs as well. Finally, to avoid problems with order bias, the researcher ensured the
vignettes were randomized.
CHAPTER 8

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results from descriptive statistics for the current study in three sections: descriptive statistics, hypothesis testing, and exploratory analyses. The descriptive statistics section describes the study’s sample size from the raw data set to the final data set and the demographic make up of the respondents. The hypothesis testing section examines the researcher’s five hypotheses by reporting the findings resulting from statistical analyses, which revealed relationships between the variables of interest (age, sex, type of cyberbullying incident) and the dependent variable (sensitivity levels). Lastly, the exploratory analyses section highlights the unanticipated findings of the current study.

A zero-order correlation was conducted because of the exploratory nature of this study. After finding relationships between the independent and dependent variables, a univariate analysis of variance was conducted, which further confirmed the findings from the zero-order correlation. Prior to conducting any analyses, the two-tailed statistical significance was set at an alpha level of 0.10 due to the exploratory nature of this study (Warner, 2007).

a. Descriptives

This study revealed raw scores from 691 respondents. Out of the final 691 respondents, 188 (27%) were eliminated from statistical analyses because they did not meet the sampling guidelines. 28 (4%) respondents were kicked out of the study because they selected “Decline to Respond” for age, and 33 (4%) respondents specified they were not current residents of the United States. 20 (2%) respondents were kicked out of the study because they indicated they
were under the age of 19. Six (0%) respondents selected “Decline to Respond” or skipped the item asking their sex. Seven (1%) respondents did not give their consent to participate and 17 (2%) respondents did not answer the validation question correctly therefore they were not able to complete the survey. Finally, 77 (11%) respondents were identified as missing because they dropped out of the study after the demographic questions. The final data set comprised of 503 respondents, with 179 respondents (36%) classified as males and 324 respondents (64%) classified as females.

As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents were female \( (n = 324, 64\%) \) and between 19 to 25 years of age \( (n = 84, 23\%) \).
Additionally, the majority self-reported a Caucasian/White identity \((n = 293, 90\%)\) and were married \((n = 173, 54\%)\). 51\% \((n = 256)\) specified they had completed either an Associates degree or Bachelors degree. Finally, nearly three quarters of respondents self identified as Christians \((n = 244, 73\%)\).

Of all the demographic variables, sex was significantly related with sensitivity levels, proposing that male respondents were more likely to believe the victim of a cyberbullying incident was being too sensitive compared to female respondents. As shown in Table 2, there

<table>
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<th>Female ((n = 324))</th>
<th>Total ((N = 503))</th>
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<td>100 (20.0)</td>
<td>160 (31.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL or CU</td>
<td>5 (1.0)</td>
<td>7 (1.0)</td>
<td>12 (2.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>97 (19.0)</td>
<td>173 (34.0)</td>
<td>270 (53.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S, D, W</td>
<td>14 (3.0)</td>
<td>44 (9.0)</td>
<td>58 (11.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>3 (1.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>3 (1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Religion</td>
<td>45 (9.0)</td>
<td>67 (13.0)</td>
<td>112 (22.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>125 (25.0)</td>
<td>244 (49.0)</td>
<td>369 (73.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7 (1.0)</td>
<td>12 (2.0)</td>
<td>19 (3.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2 (0.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>3 (1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasion</td>
<td>162 (32.0)</td>
<td>293 (58.0)</td>
<td>455 (90.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16 (3.0)</td>
<td>31 (6.0)</td>
<td>47 (9.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1 (0.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>1 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Degree of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.S. Diploma/GED</td>
<td>51 (10.0)</td>
<td>80 (16.0)</td>
<td>131 (26.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates or BA</td>
<td>84 (17.0)</td>
<td>172 (34.0)</td>
<td>256 (50.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA, PhD, JD, MD</td>
<td>42 (8.0)</td>
<td>65 (13.0)</td>
<td>107 (21.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1 (0.0)</td>
<td>4 (1.0)</td>
<td>5 (1.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values represent frequencies with percentages in parentheses.
CL = Common Law, CU = Civil Union, S = Separated, D = Divorced, W = Widowed,
H.S. = High School, GED = General Education Development, BA = Bachelor Degree,
MA = Masters Degree, PhD = Doctorate Degree, JD = Juris Doctor, MD = Medicine Doctor
was a statistically significant relationship between Sex and Sensitivity across three different vignettes: Vignette 3, $r_{pb}(478) = -.20$ with $p = .01$, Vignette 2, $r_{pb}(461) = -.29$ with $p = .01$, and Vignette 1, $r_{pb}(450) = -.23$ with $p = .01$.

Table 2. Zero-Order Correlation for Sex and Sensitivity Levels in Three Scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>V1_sensitive</th>
<th>V2_sensitive</th>
<th>V3_sensitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
<td>-0.20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V1_sensitive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
<td>0.50**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2_sensitive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.52**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3_sensitive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** $p < .01$

Note. V1 = Vignette 1, V2 = Vignette 2, V3 = Vignette 3

Overall, the zero-order correlation revealed a weak negative correlation; meaning males are less sensitive to the cyberbullying victim in each hypothetical scenario. In addition, since there were more female respondents in this study’s sample, another correlation was conducted controlling for sex. There was a statistically significant relationship between Parenthood and Sensitivity when controlling for respondent’s sex: Overall Sensitivity, $r_{pb}(416) = .17$ with $p < .00$.

b. Hypothesis Testing

As a reminder, Vignette 1 refers to a younger girl who was cyberbullied by her peers when they posted a video on the Internet portraying her as a “spoiled brat” and a “slut”. Vignette 2 refers to an incident where the cyberbully created a website enabling students to vote on “who should die next” and the victim committed suicide. Lastly, Vignette 3 refers to an incident where a cyberbully created a fake Facebook© profile and altered another student’s pictures.
7.2.1 H1: The characteristics (age, sex) of cyberbullying victims will influence the respondent's level of sensitivity in each Vignette.

H1.a. Respondent’s will be more sensitive towards female victims and younger victims when compared to male victims and older victims.

Vignette 1. There was a significant main effect of sex on sensitivity levels toward the cyberbully victim, \( F(1, 442) = 24.89, p < .01 \). This indicates that males (\( M = 1.98, SD = .80 \)) and females (\( M = 1.62, SD = .66 \)) had different levels of sensitivity toward the cyberbully victim.

There was a moderately significant main effect of Vignette condition and sensitivity scores, \( F(3, 442) = 2.30, p = .07 \). Respondent’s sensitivity levels toward the cyberbully victim varied based on the victim’s sex/age: Boy/Young, \( M = 1.79 \); Boy/Older, \( M = 1.85 \); Girl/Young, \( M = 1.66 \); Girl/Older, \( M = 1.70 \).

There was a moderately significant interaction effect between the Vignette conditions and Respondent’s Sex on sensitivity levels, \( F(3, 442) = 2.18, p = .08 \). The largest mean difference between male and female respondents was seen in situations where the victim was an older boy and an older girl. As shown in Table 3, when the victim was an older boy, male respondents (\( M = 2.20, SD = .95 \)) were less sensitive than female respondents (\( M = 1.62, SD = .69 \)).

---

1 As a reminder, sensitivity levels are measured as follows: 1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 4 = “Strongly Agree”

2 As a reminder, respondents’ level of agreement to whether the cyberbully’s First Amendment
Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Sensitivity Levels by Respondent’s Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent's Sex</th>
<th>Cyberbully Victim Characteristics</th>
<th>Vignette 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young Boy</td>
<td>2.00 (.75)</td>
<td>1.72 (.64)</td>
<td>2.20 (.95)</td>
<td>1.95 (.77)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.70 (.77)</td>
<td>1.63 (.54)</td>
<td>1.62 (.69)</td>
<td>1.53 (.63)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignette 2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.15 (.96)</td>
<td>1.80 (.84)</td>
<td>2.10 (.98)</td>
<td>2.14 (.96)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.38 (.65)</td>
<td>1.60 (.79)</td>
<td>1.58 (.80)</td>
<td>1.44 (.77)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignette 3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.02 (.79)</td>
<td>2.00 (.81)</td>
<td>1.95 (.81)</td>
<td>1.83 (.73)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.59 (.73)</td>
<td>1.59 (.73)</td>
<td>1.74 (.73)</td>
<td>1.57 (.69)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the victim was an older girl, male respondents ($M = 1.95, SD = .77$) were also less sensitive than female respondents ($M = 1.53, SD = .63$). Finally, when the victim was a younger girl both male respondents ($M = 1.72, SD = .64$) and female respondents ($M = 1.63, SD = .54$) were relatively sensitive towards the victim.

**Vignette 2.** There was a significant main effect of sex on sensitivity levels, $F(1, 451) = 46.04, p < .01$. The average mean difference for male respondents ($M = 2.05, SD = .94$) and female respondents ($M = 1.50, SD = .76$) shows males are less sensitive to cyberbullying victims than the female respondents. There was not a significant main effect of Vignette conditions on sensitivity levels, $F(3, 451) = .48, p = .69$. There was a moderately significant interaction effect between the Vignette conditions and Sex on sensitivity levels toward victims of cyberbullying, $F(3, 451) = 2.45, p = .06$. 
The univariate analysis of variance for Vignette 2 revealed differences between male and female respondents’ sensitivity levels in each manipulation. The largest mean differences between male and female respondents were seen in situations where the victim was a younger boy and an older girl. When the victim was a younger boy male respondents ($M = 2.15, SD = .96$) were less sensitive than female respondents ($M = 1.38, SD = .65$). When the victim was an older girl male respondents ($M = 2.14, SD = .96$) were also less sensitive than female respondents ($M = 1.44, SD = .77$). When the victim was an older boy male respondents ($M = 2.10, SD = .98$) were also less sensitive than female respondents ($M = 1.58, SD = .80$). Finally, when the victim was a younger girl both male respondents ($M = 1.80, SD = .84$) and female respondents ($M = 1.60, SD = .79$) were relatively sensitive towards the victim.

Vignette 3. There was a significant main effect of sex on sensitivity levels toward victims of cyberbullying, $F(1, 470) = 21.57, p < .01$. This indicates that males ($M = 1.95, SD = .78$) and females ($M = 1.63, SD = .70$) had different levels of sensitivity toward victims of cyberbullying. There was not a significant main effect of Vignette conditions on sensitivity levels, $F(3, 470) = .78, p = .50$. There was not a significant interaction effect between Vignette conditions and Sex on sensitivity levels toward the victims of cyberbullying, $F(3, 470) = .57, p = .63$.

Summary. Overall, male and female respondents sensitivity levels depended on the vignette conditions. Respondents were less sensitive to boy victims of cyberbullying when compared to girl victims of cyberbullying. Respondents were also less sensitive to older victims of cyberbullying.
7.2.2 H2: Parenthood will influence the respondent’s level of sensitivity in each vignette (1, 2, & 3).

H2.a. Respondent’s who have children will be more sensitive towards victims of cyberbullying compared to respondents without children.

As shown in Table 4, there was a statistically significant relationship between Parenthood and Sex across the three different vignettes: Vignette 3, $r_{pb}(476) = .14$ with $p = .01$; Vignette 2, $r_{pb}(459) = .13$ with $p = .01$; and Vignette 1, $r_{pb}(448) = .11$ with $p = .05$.

Table 4. Zero-Order Correlation for Parenthood and Sensitivity Levels in Three Scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parenthood</th>
<th>V3_sensitive</th>
<th>V2_sensitive</th>
<th>V1_sensitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenthood</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.14**</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3_sensitive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.52**</td>
<td>0.50**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2_sensitive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V1_sensitive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Note. V1 = Vignette 1, V2 = Vignette 2, V3 = Vignette 3

The zero-order correlation revealed a weak positive correlation, meaning respondents who are parents are more sensitive to the cyberbullying victim in each hypothetical scenario.

Vignette 1. There was a significant main effect of Parenthood on sensitivity levels toward victims of cyberbullying, $F(1, 440) = 6.78$, $p = .01$. As shown in Table BLANK, the results from Vignette 1 revealed respondents who are parents are on average more sensitive ($M = 1.67, SD = .68$) than those who are not parents ($M = 1.84, SD = .78$).
There was not a significant main effect of Vignette conditions on sensitivity levels, $F(3, 440) = 1.92, p = .12$. There was a marginally significant interaction effect between Vignette conditions and Parenthood on sensitivity levels, $F(3, 440) = 2.09, p = .10$, meaning that parents and non-parents had different sensitivity levels across the different manipulations for Vignette 1.

The means and standard deviations for the interaction effect between Vignette conditions and Parenthood revealed respondents who are parents think younger boys ($M = 1.77, SD = .75$) are the most sensitive when compared to older boys, younger girls, and older girls (see Table 5). Respondents who are not parents believed the older boy ($M = 2.10, SD = .91$) was being too sensitive when compared to the other manipulations. Parents and non-parents also had differences in which victim they thought was not being too sensitive. Parents thought the younger girl ($M = 1.56, SD = .53$) was not being too sensitive while non-parents thought the older girl ($M = 1.70, SD = .76$) was not being too sensitive.

### Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations for Sensitivity Levels by Parenthood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parenthood</th>
<th>Vignette 1</th>
<th>Vignette 2</th>
<th>Vignette 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young Boy</td>
<td>Young Girl</td>
<td>Older Boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1.77 (.75)</td>
<td>1.56 (.53)</td>
<td>1.63 (.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1.83 (.82)</td>
<td>1.75 (.61)</td>
<td>2.10 (.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.54 (.72)</td>
<td>1.64 (.83)</td>
<td>1.65 (.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.76 (.97)</td>
<td>1.71 (.79)</td>
<td>1.91 (.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.64 (.69)</td>
<td>1.72 (.73)</td>
<td>1.63 (.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.87 (.84)</td>
<td>1.76 (.75)</td>
<td>2.00 (.78)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vignette 2. The univariate analysis of variance for Vignette 2 also revealed differences between parents and non-parents sensitivity levels. There was a significant main effect of Parenthood on sensitivity levels toward victims of cyberbullying, $F(1, 449) = 8.52, p < .01$. This indicates that whether the respondent was a parent ($M = 1.59, SD = .78$) or not ($M = 1.82, SD = .94$) had an effect on levels of sensitivity. There was not a significant main effect of Vignette conditions on sensitivity levels, $F(3, 449) = .47, p = .70$. There was not a significant interaction effect between the Vignette conditions and Parenthood on sensitivity levels, $F(3, 449) = .66, p = .57$, meaning that parents and non-parents were not affected differently by the Vignette 2 manipulations.

Vignette 3. Lastly, for Vignette 3, there was also a significant main effect of Parenthood on sensitivity levels, $F(1, 468) = 9.56, p < .01$, revealing that respondents who are parents ($M = 1.64, SD = .69$) are more sensitive than those who are not parents ($M = 1.85, SD = .79$). There was not a significant main effect of Vignette conditions on sensitivity levels, $F(3, 468) = .68, p = .56$. There was not a significant interaction effect between Vignette conditions and Parenthood on sensitivity levels, $F(3, 468) = .97, p = .40$, meaning that parents and non-parents were not affected differently by the Vignette 3 manipulations.

Summary. The univariate analysis of variance assessing the relationship between parenthood and sensitivity levels in the three different vignettes revealed that whether or not the respondent is a parent plays a role in their sensitivity levels. Overall, parents were more sensitive toward victims of cyberbullying when compared to non-parents.
7.2.3 H3: Cognitive disposition differences between respondents will affect their sensitivity levels in each Vignette (1, 2, & 3).

As shown in Table 6, sensitivity was significantly related to three individual differences variables: Social Values, \( r_{pb} (438) = -.19 \) with \( p = .01 \); Hedonism, \( r_{pb} (438) = -.13 \) with \( p = .01 \); and Internal Values, \( r_{pb} (438) = -.19 \) with \( p = .01 \).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V3_sensitive</th>
<th>V2_sensitive</th>
<th>V1_sensitive</th>
<th>MDKS_SV_Total</th>
<th>MDKS_IV_Total</th>
<th>MDKS_HED_Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V3_sensitive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.52**</td>
<td>-0.19**</td>
<td>-0.19**</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2_sensitive</td>
<td>0.50**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V1_sensitive</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.19**</td>
<td>-0.13**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDKS_SV_Total</td>
<td>-0.19**</td>
<td>0.59**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.51**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDKS_IV_Total</td>
<td>-0.12**</td>
<td>-0.19**</td>
<td>0.51**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDKS_HED_Total</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.13**</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** \( p < .01 \)

Note. V1 = Vignette 1, V2 = Vignette 2, V3 = Vignette 3, MDKS = Moral Decision Making Scale, SV = Social Values, IV = Internal Values, HED = Hedonistic.

The zero-order correlation revealed a weak negative correlation with Social Values, Internal Values and Hedonism; meaning respondents who scored high on Social Values, Internal Values and Hedonism were more sensitive toward the victim of cyberbullying.

When testing interactions between a categorical and continuous variable it is necessary to center the variables. Since Vignette is a categorical variable and Social Values, Internal Values and Hedonism are continuous variables, the author decided to center all three cognitive disposition variables prior to conducting any statistical analyses. The continuous predictor variables were centered in order to increase the ability to interpret the interaction. After centering each cognitive disposition variable, a linear regression analysis was conducted. The only cognitive disposition variable that revealed a statistically significant relationship was Social Values in Vignette 1 and Vignette 3.
For Vignette 1, there was a significant main effect of Social Values on sensitivity levels, $b = -.24, t = -2.76, p < .01$, meaning individuals with low social values are less sensitive to victims of cyberbullying and vice versa. Although it was relatively close to having a marginally significant relationship, there was not a significant main effect of Vignette conditions on sensitivity levels, $b = -.04, t = -1.52, p = .12$. Lastly, there was not a significant interaction effect between Vignette conditions and Social Values on sensitivity levels, $b = .32, t = .94, p = .34$.

For Vignette 3, there was a significant main effect of Social Values on sensitivity levels, $b = -.21, t = -2.56, p = .01$; meaning individuals with low social values are less sensitive to victims of cyberbullying and vice versa. There was not a significant main effect of Vignette conditions on sensitivity levels, $b = -.01, t = -.45, p = .64$. Finally, there was not a significant interaction effect between Vignette conditions and Social Values on sensitivity levels, $b = .02, t = .86, p = .38$.

*Summary.* The linear regression revealed individuals with low social values are less sensitive to victims of cyberbullying. Individuals with low social values do not abide by societal norms/formal laws and they are often antisocial. Their inattention to formal laws reaffirms the finding that they are less sensitive to victims of cyberbullying because it can be assumed they do not believe in cyberbullying laws.
7.2.4 H4: Respondents’ exposure to media will be related to differences in sensitivity levels.

H4.a. Respondent’s who view two or more hours of media a day will be more sensitive towards the victim in each vignette.

The zero-order correlation revealed no statistically significant relationship between amount of media exposure and sensitivity levels therefore no further analysis was conducted.

7.2.5 H5: Male respondents who strongly believe in First Amendment rights to freedom of speech will have a higher level of agreement with the First Amendment rights statement (I feel the child’s First Amendment rights were violated).

As shown in Table 7, there was a statistically significant relationship between Sex and the respondents’ level of agreement to whether the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights were violated: Vignette 1, $r_{pb}(447) = -.16$ with $p = .01$.

Table 7. Zero-Order Correlation for First Amendment Rights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>V1_FirstAmend</th>
<th>V2_FirstAmend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.16**</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V1_FirstAmend</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.56**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2_FirstAmend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** $p < .01$

Note. V1 = Vignette 1, V2 = Vignette 2

---

2 As a reminder, respondents’ level of agreement to whether the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights were violated or not was measured as follows: 1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 4 = “Strongly Agree”
Overall, the zero-order correlation revealed a weak negative correlation, meaning males are more likely to believe the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights were violated when compared to female respondents.

In Vignette 1’s analysis, there was a significant main effect of Sex on attitudes toward First Amendment rights, $F(1, 439) = 11.88, p < .01$. As shown in Table 7, the means and standards deviations revealed male respondents ($M = 2.20, SD = .92$) were more likely to think the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights were violated than female respondents ($M = 1.91, SD = .83$).

Table 8. Means and Standard Deviations for Level of Agreement to Whether the Cyberbully’s First Amendment Rights Were Violated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent's Sex</th>
<th>Young Boy</th>
<th>Young Girl</th>
<th>Older Boy</th>
<th>Older Girl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vignette 1</td>
<td>2.08 (.82)</td>
<td>2.29 (.95)</td>
<td>2.20 (1.04)</td>
<td>2.23 (.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.97 (.91)</td>
<td>2.00 (.73)</td>
<td>1.79 (.82)</td>
<td>1.85 (.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was not a significant main effect of Vignette conditions on the respondents attitudes towards First Amendment rights, $F(3, 439) = .56, p = .63$. There was not a significant interaction effect between Vignette condition and respondents attitudes toward First Amendment rights, $F(3, 439) = .62, p = .60$, meaning male and female respondents were not affected by the Vignette conditions when considering whether the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights were violated.
Summary. Overall, the only vignette that revealed a statistically significant relationship between sex and the respondents’ level of agreement to whether the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights were violated was Vignette 1. Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to believe the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights had been violated. It is also important to mention that the statement relating to First Amendment rights was only asked in Vignette 1 and 2. Vignette 2 is the most severe of the vignettes because the victim of cyberbullying in that scenario committed suicide. Due to Vignette 2’s severity, it is logical to assume respondents would not think the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights were violated in that particular situation.
CHAPTER 9
DISCUSSION

The current study was the first to examine the relationship between cyberbullying victim characteristics (sex, age), type of cyberbullying incident, amount and type of media exposure, and cognitive disposition differences among respondents on community attitudes using vignettes, or hypothetical scenarios. Although there was no previous research examining this facet of cyberbullying, this study revealed numerous statistically significant and moderately significant findings. As expected, sex and age of the victim in different cyberbullying incidents played the biggest role in how the respondents interpreted the vignettes. There were apparent differences between male and female respondents sensitivity levels depending on the sex and age of the victim and type of cyberbullying incident. Cognitive disposition differences among the respondents and whether they were a parent or not also significantly impacted their attitudes towards the different vignettes.

Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1975) theory of planned behavior proved to be an accurate explanation of how individuals form their attitudes regarding different cyberbullying incidents. Respondent’s demographics, such as being male or female, influenced their attitudes concerning the different vignettes. Supporting the author’s hypothesis, this study revealed females are generally more sensitive to victims of cyberbullying than males. The findings when investigating the relationship between sex and sensitivity levels for Vignette 2 revealed an age and sex bias. Both male and female respondents in Vignette 2’s analysis were more sensitive to
younger girls whereas they were less sensitive to boys. In our society, boys are often expected to have “tougher skin” than girls and to suppress their emotions, which could explain why respondents felt more sensitive towards girl victims (Burn & Ward, 2005). Some researchers assert that men learn masculinity through socialization. Thompson and Pleck (1986) argued that traditional masculinity consists of three norms: anti-femininity, toughness and success. These norms create an environment that encourages adolescent boys to suppress their feelings. In addition, it encourages parents to ignore their child’s behavior because they expect boys to be tough.

Age also had an impact on respondent’s attitudes toward the victim of cyberbullying. Both male and female respondents were more sensitive to younger victims regarding Vignette 1 and 2. This finding demonstrates the tendency for individuals in the United States to expect older teens to be more mature and responsible. Research regarding adolescent brain development shows individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 are more mature and responsible; which is one reason why the age of majority in most states in the United States is age 18 (Steinberg, 2005). Due to this expectation, respondents likely felt less sensitive towards older victims because they thought the older victim should be less emotionally fragile and able to take criticism easier than a younger victim. In Vignette 3’s analysis, respondents agreed on sensitivity levels across the different manipulations. Vignette 3 was the least severe out of the three vignettes, which could explain why respondents were in agreement. Another explanation for the similarity in the respondent’s sensitivity levels is the possibility that the manipulation was not strong enough. Overall, respondents, particularly female respondents, were more sensitive to younger victims of cyberbullying.
Whether the respondent was a parent had an impact on their sensitivity levels regarding the different vignettes. In support of the author’s hypothesis, respondent’s who were parents were overall more sensitive towards the victim of cyberbullying. One may assume respondent’s who are parents are more sympathetic to the victim of cyberbullying because they envision the incidents in the vignettes as if it were occurring to their own child, therefore, they may consider how they would handle the situation when answering the question. This supports Fishbein and Ajzens idea that individuals form their attitudes based on their demographics.

Another relationship examined in this study was whether respondents felt the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights had been violated or not. As stated in the literature review, there have been many instances where school districts overstep their boundaries in punishing students who perpetrate cyberbullying. This new form of bullying incited a great deal of debate concerning whose responsibility it should be to punish the cyberbully. The controversy surrounding this issue led the author to investigate respondent’s attitudes toward the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights. Of the two vignettes, which had an item regarding the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights, only Vignette 1 revealed a statistically significant finding. In general, male respondents were more likely to think the cyberbully’s First Amendment rights had been violated when compared to female respondents. This further asserts that males are in general more harsh and tough towards victims of cyberbullying than females.

It is also worth mentioning the fact that Vignette 1 pertained to an adolescent being cyberbullied by his or her peers when they posted a video of her on YouTube© portraying her as a “spoiled brat” and a “slut.” Vignette 2 pertained to an adolescent being voted by his or her peers to “die next.” The victim committed suicide and the cyberbully was charged with criminal negligence. The cyberbully’s parents then filed a suit against the city because they felt their
child’s First Amendment rights had been violated. It can be assumed that respondents were more likely to agree with the statement in Vignette 1 when compared to Vignette 2 because Vignette 1 did not end in any physical harm to the victim.

Respondent’s cognitive disposition was also assessed in order to examine whether or not individuals “moral compass” has an impact on their sensitivity levels. Of the three decision-making values, Social Values was the only one significantly related to sensitivity levels, meaning individuals with less social values are less sensitive to victims of cyberbullying. In other words, individuals who are less likely to follow societal norms and formal laws are less sensitive to victims of cyberbullying.

Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1975) theory of planned behavior also asserted that information, such as media exposure, has an impact on individual’s attitudes. In order to test this theory, the author asked three questions pertaining to respondent’s media exposure. Respondents were asked what types of media they accessed, how long they spent watching the media and how long they spent on the Internet each day. Though a relationship was expected between media exposure and sensitivity levels, no relationship was found; therefore, no further analyses were conducted regarding these two variables.

a. Policy Implications

Overall, sex seemed to play the biggest role in respondent’s attitudes towards cyberbullying. Both the sex of the victim of cyberbullying and the sex of the respondent had an impact on the respondent’s sensitivity levels. In general, males are less sensitive towards the victim of cyberbullying; therefore an educational class geared towards men would be beneficial in educating men on how to handle this type of situation if their child is being cyberbullied. In addition, statistics show male adolescents also experience psychological problems, such as low
self-esteem, and many even commit suicide from cyberbullying incidents (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). Parents may ignore their child’s needs if they expect boys to handle these situations by being “tough.”

An educational class may also be beneficial to inform parents about the psychological problems that can affect boys, not just girls. Parents may give more attention to girls in a cyberbullying situation than they would boys and ignoring their child’s behavior can have serious consequences, which they may not realize. An educational class informing parents of the serious consequences resulting from cyberbullying incidents would help parents learn about the new risks associated with technology. In my opinion, school administrators should host an informational session about social media sites and other avenues frequently used by perpetrators of cyberbullying. Informing parents about parental settings on their child’s computer and cell phone may help reduce the chance of their child becoming a victim to cyberbullying. Notifying parents that boys are also commonly involved in cyberbullying is also essential to the prevention and resolution of cyberbullying incidents. Also, research shows many adolescents who are cyberbullied also are the perpetrators of cyberbullying (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Parents who know it is more likely for their child to also become a cyberbully after being the victim of cyberbullying can take preventative measures to avoid an incident where their child causes psychological harm or even physical harm, such as suicide, upon another individual.

b. Limitations

When conducting social science research it is difficult to dispose of all limitations. Due to the time constraint for collecting a sample from the “general population of Internet users,” the author’s sample size was relatively small and likely not generalizable to the entire population of Internet users. In addition, the sampling method used was a non-probability sample known as
snowball sampling. Snowball sampling presents the issue of sampling bias and volunteer bias. In snowball sampling, the researcher recruits respondents and informs the respondents to pass their questionnaire along to their family and friends. Recruiting respondents the researcher knows can create sampling bias because the respondent’s friends and family are likely to have similar opinions.

Research shows individuals who volunteer to participate in research are often different from those who do not volunteer (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 2009). Participants who volunteer usually are more intelligent, have a higher educational level, higher job status, higher need for approval and less authoritarianism. Previous research has suggested volunteers are more inclined to be sociable, unconventional, younger and arousal seeking. Since the study only targeted Internet users, the researcher may have encountered volunteer bias, reducing the generalizability to the entire population. However, volunteer bias is a problem for face-to-face survey designs as well. Additionally, although the conditions within each vignette were randomized, the vignettes themselves were not, leaving the potential for order bias. In other words, seeing Vignette 2 (where the cyberbully victim commits suicide) first may have influenced the respondent’s level of sensitivity for the other, less severe Vignettes. Future research should randomize the vignettes in order to limit order bias.

After each vignette a comment box was provided giving respondents the opportunity to voice any concerns or additional comments regarding the vignettes. Numerous respondent’s suggested the researcher provide additional answer choices for the questions regarding who should be responsible for disciplining the child and how disruptive the incident is to the school environment. The question regarding who is responsible for disciplining the child contained three statements with three answer choices each. The statements were parents, law enforcement
and school administrators. The respondent could then choose “Not at All Responsible,” “Completely Responsible” or “Decline to Respond.” The second question regarding how disruptive the cyberbullying incident was to the school environment contained three answer choices: “Not Disruptive at All,” “Highly Disruptive” and “Decline to Respond.” The decision to have two answer choices was justified because in a trial involving a suit against the school district for violating a cyberbully’s First Amendment rights, the jury has to make a decision on whether or not that child’s rights were violated. The jury would not get the option to say, “Maybe” or “I’m not sure.” The respondents were forced to make a choice one way or the other just as they would if they were jurors in a cyberbullying trial. Future research could consider providing additional answer choices to give the respondent more leeway in answering the questions.

c. Conclusion

Previous research on cyberbullying has focused on defining cyberbullying versus traditional bullying, psychological problems associated with this behavior and legal issues that arose from this new form of bullying. Prior studies have not addressed the impact of cyberbullying victim characteristics (age, sex), type of cyberbullying incident, cognitive disposition differences and media exposure on community attitudes of cyberbullying. In addition, no studies have examined how the respondent’s sex and whether they are a parent or not impacts their sensitivity levels concerning cyberbullying incidents.

The current study closes a gap in the literature by being the first to examine this facet of cyberbullying through vignettes. Four of the five hypotheses proposed were validated through statistical analyses and added empirical data to current literature on cyberbullying. Overall, the current study revealed the need for educational classes geared towards males and parents in
general in order to prevent psychological harm and physical harm to both their children and their child’s peers. It is important for parents to know ways to detect this behavior and how to stop it before it is too late. Educational classes, taught by school administrators, informing parents of preventative tactics would be beneficial in the overall deterrence of cyberbullying.
References


ALM GL ch. 71, § 370 (2010).


Barr v. Lafon, 217 518 (6th Cir. 2007).


Morse v. Frederick, 127 2618 (S. Ct. 2007).


ORS § 339.351 (2010).


Wisniewski v. Board of Education of the Weedsport Central School District, 06-3394 (2d Cir. 2007).


Appendix A – Community Attitudes Toward Cyberbullying

The next group of questions has to do with your attitudes toward online bullying.

You will be asked 10 questions about your attitudes regarding three different online bullying scenarios. There is no right or wrong answer for these questions. You will probably find that you like some of the items and dislike some others and that is okay. We realize that everyone is different, so please respond as honestly as you can. We will also provide a comment box at the end of each scenario for any thoughts or comments that you would like to expand on.

Remember, this survey is completely confidential and anonymous, meaning that there is no way that your responses will be linked back to you.

First Scenario:
A girl/boy is made fun of by her/his younger/older peers when they posted a video on YouTube. The video showed his/her peers describing him/her as a slut/manwhore and a spoiled brat/douchebag. Her/his peers had posted the video from a home computer. Once the principal of the school learned of this incident, he suspended the perpetrator for 5 days. The perpetrator’s parents then decided to sue the school district because they felt their child’s First Amendment rights were violated.

1 = Strongly Disagree     2 = Disagree     3 = Agree     4 = Strongly Agree     X = Decline to Respond

1. I feel the child’s First Amendment rights were violated. 1 2 3 4 X
2. If this was my child, I would sue the school district. 1 2 3 4 X
3. Suspending the student for 5 days was appropriate in this situation. 1 2 3 4 X
4. In the U.S., people have the right to say whatever they want no matter what effect it may have on other individuals. 1 2 3 4 X
5. The victim in this incident is too sensitive. 1 2 3 4 X
6. I consider this to be a form of “cyberbullying”. 1 2 3 4 X
7. What the perpetrator did is a normal behavior in adolescence. 1 2 3 4 X

For Question #8 use the following scale:
1 = Not Disruptive at All     4 = Highly Disruptive     X = Decline to Respond

8. How disruptive would you say this incident is to the school environment? 1 2 3 4 X
For Question #9 use the following scale:

1 = Not At All Responsible  
4 = Completely Responsible  
X = Decline to Respond

9. Who should be responsible for disciplining the child?
   - the school  
   1 2 3 4 X
   - law enforcement  
   1 2 3 4 X
   - parents/guardian  
   1 2 3 4 X

10. Please leave any additional comments regarding this scenario below (Please do not include any identifying information in the response below):

Second Scenario:
A girl/boy creates a website called, “The Unofficial Owlby High Home Page” and posts fake obituaries of students and enables visitors of the website to vote on “who should die next.” Soon after the student created the website, a younger/older girl/boy commits suicide because she/he had received the most hits to “die next.” The girl/boy who created the website was then arrested for criminal negligence due to the victim’s death. The parents of the perpetrator then sued the city because they believed their child’s First Amendment rights had been violated.

1 = Strongly Disagree  
2 = Disagree  
3 = Agree  
4 = Strongly Agree  
X = Decline to Respond

11. I feel the child’s First Amendment rights were violated. 
   1 2 3 4 X
12. If this was my child, I would sue the city. 
   1 2 3 4 X
13. Arresting the student for criminal negligence was appropriate in this situation. 
   1 2 3 4 X
14. The victim in this incident is too sensitive. 
   1 2 3 4 X
15. I consider this to be a form of “cyberbullying”. 
   1 2 3 4 X
16. What the perpetrator did is a normal behavior in adolescence. 
   1 2 3 4 X
17. The perpetrator is responsible for the suicide. 
   1 2 3 4 X
18. The perpetrator should receive additional charges. 
   1 2 3 4 X
19. The perpetrator should be suspended from school. 
   1 2 3 4 X
20. The victim should not have let what other people say or do affect her/him to the point where she/he would kill herself/himself. 
   1 2 3 4 X

For Question #22 use the following scale:
21. How disruptive would you say this incident is to
the school environment?
1 2 3 4 X

For Question #23 use the following scale:
1 = Not At All Responsible 4 = Completely Responsible X = Decline to Respond

22. Who should be responsible for disciplining the child?

the school 1 2 3 4 X
law enforcement 1 2 3 4 X
parents/guardian 1 2 3 4 X

23. Please leave any additional comments regarding this scenario below (Please do not
include any identifying information in the response below):

Third Scenario:
A girl/boy creates a fake Facebook profile and alters another student’s pictures, portraying the
younger/older student as “overweight” and “ugly.” The student finds out about the Facebook
profile when she/he hears her/his peers laughing about the profile in the hallway at school. The
student then feels uncomfortable going to school and tells her/his parents. Her/his parents tell
her/him to ignore the other students.

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Agree 4 = Strongly Agree X = Decline
to Respond

24. If that was my child, I would tell him/her to ignore the
other students. 1 2 3 4 X
25. The victim in this incident is too sensitive. 1 2 3 4 X
26. I consider this to be a form of “cyberbullying”. 1 2 3 4 X
27. What the perpetrator did is a normal behavior in
adolescence. 1 2 3 4 X
28. The perpetrator should be suspended from school. 1 2 3 4 X
29. The victim should just block the perpetrator on Facebook. 1 2 3 4 X
30. The parents gave their child the right advice. 1 2 3 4 X
31. The parents should notify the school and disciplinary
action should be taken against the perpetrator. 1 2 3 4 X

For Question #22 use the following scale:
32. How disruptive would you say this incident is to the school environment?

1 = Not Disruptive at All  4 = Highly Disruptive  X = Decline to Respond

33. Who should be responsible for disciplining the child?

1 = Not At All Responsible  4 = Completely Responsible  X = Decline to Respond

- the school
- law enforcement
- parents/guardian

34. Please leave any additional comments regarding this scenario below (Please do not include any identifying information in the response below):