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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

An Examination of Catholic School Teachers' Perceptions and Legal Understanding of  
Cyberbullying

by

Mary Beth Boyer

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,  
Loyola Marymount University,  
in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2015

An Examination of Catholic School Teachers' Perceptions and Legal Understanding of  
Cyberbullying

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by

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This dissertation written by Mary Beth Boyer, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

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An Examination of Catholic School Teachers' Perceptions and Legal Understanding of  
Cyberbullying

by

**Mary Beth Boyer**

The bully has been a figure in adolescent life for decades; however, the nature of bullying in the 21st Century has changed as it has moved to cyberspace. Bullying has taken on a new form termed cyberbullying. This quantitative survey design study examined Catholic school teachers' legal understanding and perceptions of cyberbullying. In examining Catholic school teachers' understanding of the law governing cyberbullying, their concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying, and their perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying, the study examined the human interactions that reflect not only legal responsibilities, but also ethical obligations as caring and just leaders in Catholic schools.

A survey instrument was distributed online to eight Catholic schools within the Diocese of St. Aquinas (a pseudonym). The study showed that Catholic school teachers had limited understanding of the law governing cyberbullying. Findings indicated that Catholic school teachers were concerned about cyberbullying and perceived a high level of responsibility in

addressing cyberbullying, but did not perceive an ability to effectively respond to cyberbullying. The findings support the need for professional development programs to increase Catholic school teachers' awareness of cyberbullying and provide comprehensive training on how to respond effectively. Findings also suggest re-examination of teacher preparation programs to provide training to teachers on how to recognize and effectively manage cyberbullying. Persistent attention to private school law and current case analysis should be an ongoing practice at the diocesan level with the intent to disseminate legal information and direction to Catholic school principals and teachers.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background to the Study

My daughter wasn't bullied to death, she was disappointed to death. Disappointed in people she thought she could trust, her school, and the police. She was my daughter, but she was your daughter too. For the love of God, do something. (Canning, 2013, para. 25)

These are the words of Glenn Canning following the suicide of his daughter, Rehtaeh Parsons. In 2013, Rehtaeh took her own life at the age of 17. She was sexually assaulted when she was 15, and a photo of the incident was circulated online and texted to her school and community. It is alleged that the relentless taunting contributed to her suicide.

On September 7, 2012, Amanda Todd posted *My Story: Struggling, Bullying, Suicide and Self-Harm*, a video on YouTube that detailed the torment and bullying she endured from classmates and strangers as a result of a revealing photo shared on Facebook. She became depressed, started cutting, and attempted suicide. People commented on her Facebook page that she should "try harder to kill herself." On October 10, 2012, she did. She died at the age of 15.

Teens and tweens confront challenges on a daily basis that can escalate to a point of no return. The stories of Rehtaeh and Amanda are just two cases of adolescent struggles with tragic endings. Extreme cases like these are rare; however, that does not warrant ignoring such cases or discounting the phenomenon of cyberbullying. Hinduja and Patchin (2010), directors of the Cyberbullying Research Center, have suggested, "It is unlikely that experience with cyberbullying *by itself* leads to youth suicide. Rather, it tends to exacerbate instability and

hopelessness in the minds of adolescents already struggling with stressful life circumstances” (p. 217).

### **Introduction**

The bully has been a figure in adolescent life for decades; however, the nature of bullying in the 21st century has changed as it has moved from the playground to cyberspace.

Traditionally, bullying behavior was face-to-face; but with the advent and popularity of the Internet and other electronic technologies, along with the introduction of electronic communication in the classrooms, bullying has taken on a new form, termed “cyberbullying” (Mason, 2008). Providing a synthesized definition, Hinduja and Patchin (2012) described cyberbullying as, “The willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices” (p. 32). The advent of this new type of bullying provoke concern because it persists beyond the school setting and can occur 24 hours a day and at any time (Tokunga, 2010). It is an international epidemic (Li, 2007) that takes place predominantly outside of school, but significantly impacts the school setting (Tokunga, 2010).

Recent national attention to several cases of suicide among youth victims of cyberbullying has raised concerns about the prevalence and psychological impact of cyberbullying. Although 49 states—as of April 2014—had enacted antibullying laws, only 19 states had legislation in place requiring that schools address electronic harassment in their antibullying policies.

Research has indicated that teachers are aware of traditional face-to-face bullying; however, cyberbullying is often overlooked in the discussion of bullying (Li, 2007). Students demonstrated a belief that teachers disregard cyberbullying as a concern; over 80% of students in

one study indicated that they would not tell a teacher if they were being cyberbullied, largely because they thought the school could not, or would not, do anything to stop the bullying (Li, 2010).

Teachers who are able to effectively recognize cyberbullying as a problem in their school environment have the ability to empower the entire school community to effectively deal with cyberbullying (Paul, Smith, & Blumberg, 2012). However, students do not perceive teachers or school officials as knowledgeable about, or effective in, addressing cyberbullying (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). Students' perceptions that teachers were indifferent toward cyberbullying were confirmed in a study by Stauffer, Heath, Coyne, and Ferrin (2012), who asked teachers if they thought cyberbullying toughens kids. Eighteen percent of teachers surveyed were neutral or agreed with the statement that cyberbullying toughens kids, and of the same population, 25% were neutral or disagreed with the statement "cyberbullying has long-lasting negative effects" (p. 355).

With over 90% of teens actively participating in cyberspace, there is an increased potential for cyberbullying among youth. Studies have found that anywhere from 10 to 40% of students in the samples were victims of cyberbullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012). Among social media users, 88% of teens have seen someone be mean or cruel to another person on a social network site, and 15% of teen social media users have experienced similar online harassment themselves (Lenhart et al., 2011).

Nonmalicious posting of embarrassing content can have consequences just as harmful as physical bullying and as dangerous as intentional bullying. There is a strong possibility that unintentional bullying takes place in cyberspace, where harmful content is nearly impossible to

eliminate. Digital content is easily and quickly copied, spread, and manipulated, which reinforces harm caused by online bullying (Huang & Chou, 2013).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although school personnel are encouraged to focus on empowering young people with the values, skills, and motivation to protect themselves, to avoid doing harm to others, and to take personal responsibility to promote a kind and respectful online world, prior research has indicated that students have not always been responsive to school personnel in this regard (Mason, 2008). Students believe that schools do not view cyberbullying as a problem (Unnever & Cornell, 2003; Williams & Cornell, 2006) and that teachers are uninformed about how to recognize or address cyberbullying (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Kowalski et al., 2008). This perception discourages students—both victims and bystanders—from reporting cases of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying has become more prevalent and raises concerns because of its potential for widespread dissemination and intensified humiliation of targeted students. Cyberbullied students experience negative outcomes similar to those experienced by victims of face-to-face bullying including depression, poor academic performance, and problem behavior (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). Cyber-victimization is also linked to suicidal ideation, and students with these thoughts are more likely to attempt suicide than their peers (S. Hinduja, & Patchin, J., 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Tokunaga, 2010).

The challenge for educators who are confronted with cyberbullying is to recognize the impact cyberbullying has on the school environment (Shariff, 2004). While most cyberbullying does not occur or originate in school, the consequences of these behaviors significantly affect

what is going on at school. As students embrace the Internet, educators must recognize and respond to signs of cyberbullying before children's well-being and learning are adversely affected (Epstein & Kazmierczak, 2006). For the critical role teachers can play in preventing cyberbullying among students, researchers should understand how teachers perceive this type of relatively new aggressive behavior (Huang & Chou, 2013; Stauffer, Heath, Coyne, & Ferrin, 2012).

As legal action concerning cyberbullying is beginning to surface, teachers need to be knowledgeable about the laws governing teacher interaction with students; teachers are expected to exercise steps to prevent harm so students can be educated in an environment free from fear. Teachers have the same legal responsibility *in loco parentis*, "in place of parents."

*In loco parentis* places an affirmative obligation on school personnel to anticipate or foresee that certain acts involving student conduct may be harmful to other students. Once such acts are determined, teachers must initiate prudent measures to prevent foreseeable harm to students. (Essex, 2011, p. 194)

Both public and Catholic schools are obligated to act in place of a student's guardian; however, public schools, unlike Catholic schools, are government agents and have corresponding rights that may not necessarily transfer to Catholic schools. This includes being subject to First Amendment restrictions. When debates about US Constitutional rights arise—such as free speech—public school rights differ from those found in Catholic schools. Teachers need to understand the laws governing cyberbullying while balancing *in loco parentis* responsibility and respecting the rights of students. Within Catholic schools, an extended scope of responsibilities

for the teacher is a set of general moral commitments to respect the dignity of each person and emphasize the pursuit of peace and social justice (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993).

Although teachers are integral in providing the leadership necessary to address concerns about cyberbullying, limited research exists in the United States about school teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying or their understanding of the law governing cyberbullying. At the time of this study (March 2015), no literature was found that examined Catholic school teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying or their understanding of the law governing cyberbullying.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative, survey design study was to examine Catholic school teachers' legal understanding and perceptions of cyberbullying. In examining Catholic school teachers' understanding of the law governing cyberbullying, their concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying, and their perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying, the study examined the human interactions that reflect not only legal responsibilities, but also ethical obligations as caring and just leaders in Catholic schools, with the purpose of filling a gap in the professional literature and providing implications for practice.

### **Research Questions**

The aim of this study was to examine Catholic school teachers' legal understanding and perceptions of cyberbullying. The study was guided by the following research questions:

**Q1.** What are Catholic school teachers' understandings of the law governing cyberbullying?

**Q2.** What are Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying?



- Q3.** What are Catholic school teachers' perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying?
- Q4.** What are Catholic school teachers' perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying?
- Q5.** Do Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, or their perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying differ by their sex, grade level taught, or self-reported technology skills?
- Q6.** Are there any relationships among Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, and perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying?

### **Significance of the Study**

Every child should have the right to feel safe at school, and bullying erodes those feelings of safety. School teachers have a duty of care; they must ensure these rights are upheld (Byers, Caltabiano, & Caltabiano, 2011). It is possible for school authorities to be held responsible for breaching their duty of care to students by failing to take reasonable care to prevent harm (Butler, Kift, Campbell, Spears, & Slee, 2011). Cyberbullying, especially when not addressed effectively, can lead to negative effects upon school climate, harm student-victims' academic performance and attendance, and threaten the mental and emotional health of those who undergo severe attacks of cyberbullying (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). Although cyberspace holds tremendous promise for creating a connected world, the Internet can inadvertently undermine the quality of human interaction which, under certain conditions, can allow emotional impulses to become destructive (Mason, 2008).

Further research on cyberbullying will provide information to teachers so they can better recognize, handle, and prevent cyberbullying cases in their school environment (Moore-Thomas & Lent, 2007); Williams & Cornell, 2006). When teachers are able to effectively recognize cyberbullying as a problem in their school environments, they can empower whole school communities to deal effectively with cyberbullying. Recognizing cyberbullying as a problem brings awareness to the phenomenon, which is crucial and leads to being able to effectively respond to cyberbullying (Paul et al., 2012).

In examining Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, and their understanding of the law governing cyberbullying, the researcher will examine human interactions that reflect not only legal responsibilities, but also ethical obligations as caring and just leaders in Catholic schools, with the purpose of filling a gap in professional literature and providing implications for practice.

### **Overview of Theoretical Frameworks**

This research study was guided by two theoretical frameworks: the social ecological theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) and the bystander theory established by Latane and Darley (1970). A synthesis of both frameworks provided a lens for evaluating Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, and their understanding of the law governing cyberbullying.

The social ecological theory conceptualized by developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) provides a model of connections between human beings, and addresses how human development is affected by the social ecology. Bronfenbrenner's model provides an understanding of people, their development, and how they adapt to their environment. The model

includes four nested settings including the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the chronosystem. Based on the social ecological theory, the impact of cyberbullying on a student in one setting will translate to other interconnected settings. Schools and teachers are considered part of the microsystem, and a teacher's response to cyberbullying within the microsystem will further impact the interconnected systems.

The social ecological theory has been applied to school-based bullying by identifying risks and protections across all contexts in which youth are involved. As Swearer and Doll (2001) have discussed, bullying needs to be viewed from a social ecological framework and is best understood as an "Interaction between the individual and his or her peer group, school, family and community" (p. 19). In understanding the teachers' roles, it is necessary to understand not only physical characteristics of the school that influence cyberbullying, but also teachers' contributions to the school environment. For the purpose of this research study, the teachers' contributions being studied included teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying, and their understanding of the law governing cyberbullying.

The second theoretical framework guiding this research was the bystander intervention theory developed by Latane and Darley (1970). This theory describes a series of stages that lead to an individual's decision to intervene when someone needs help. For the purpose of this research, the teacher constituted the bystander. The theory was used as a lens to examine teachers' roles in intervening in cyberbullying.

Latane and Darley's (1970) model includes five stages that occur in a sequential pattern. The five-stage model suggests the decision to intervene is complex (Burn, 2009) and any barrier

along the path may prevent a bystander's choice to intervene. The model begins with the bystander recognizing an event as warranting help, progresses through the stages, and culminates with the bystanders executing intervention. Applying the bystander model to this research study, the first stage begins with a teacher noticing an incident of cyberbullying and concludes with the teacher intervening. Examining the teacher as part of mesosystem within Bronfenbrenner's theory, along with serving as the bystander in Latane and Darley's model, provided a relevant and appropriate lens for this research study.

### **Overview of Methodology**

The aim of this quantitative study was to examine Catholic school teachers' perceptions and legal understanding of cyberbullying. Because incidences of cyberbullying increase during elementary school, peak in middle school, and then decrease in high school (Beale & Hall, 2007; Li, 2007; Ryoo, Wang, & Swearer, 2014; Tokunaga, 2010), the sample included teachers in elementary and middle schools.

The study used a survey research design. A survey design "provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population. From sample results, the researcher generalizes or draws inferences to the population" (Creswell, 2014, p. 155). The researcher set out to examine how the independent variables for this study (sex, grade level, participation in professional development, completion of an education law course) were related to the dependent variables (teacher concerns about cyberbullying, teacher perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, and teacher understanding of the law governing cyberbullying).

Since there is a lack of research on teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying and a dearth of established survey instruments, this study used modified questions from a previous research study published by (Li, 2010) and a survey tool "Cyberbullying Report Card for Schools" created by Hinduja and Patchin (2009). The prior surveys were modified to address the research questions proposed in this study. The researcher obtained permissions from Li as well as Hinduja and Patchin to use their survey instruments for the purpose of this research study. It should be noted that the survey instrument created by Li (2009) was distributed to preservice teachers; the results are presented in Chapter 2 of this study. The survey tool developed by Hinduja and Patchin (2009) was created as a tool for school administrators and was not used in their research. The reliability and validity of the "Cyberbullying Report Card for Schools" was not determined; however, the developers of the tool are prominent practitioners in the field of cyberbullying research and are considered experts in their field of study. Hinduja and Patchin are also the co-directors of the Cyberbullying Research Center and have studied the causes and consequences of cyberbullying.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

#### **Limitations**

Limitations are uncontrollable aspects of a study the researcher knows may negatively affect the results or generalizability of the results (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). The first limitation in this study was the possibility of experimenter bias. Experimenter bias occurs when a researcher's expectations of the study results contribute to producing the outcome (Gay et al., 2006). At the time of data collection, the researcher of this study was a teacher in the diocese of St. Aquinas, which could have generated experimenter bias. That said, the quantitative nature of

the study reduced the potential for experimenter bias in that the researcher was not interpreting qualitative responses where personal views might have confounded the results. The second limitation to the study was the result from self-reported data. Asking teachers to self-report their perceptions of cyberbullying may have resulted in exaggerated, under-reported, or misrepresented responses that could not be independently verified.

The use of nonvalidated survey instruments may have created a limitation of the study. The literature suggests that a large sample size may mitigate this risk (Gay et al., 2006; Rovai, Baker, & Ponton, 2014). The sample size of 100 participants and the response rate of 58% helped reduce this possibility. The survey instrument was standardized to minimize the risk of participants misinterpreting questions. The researcher piloted the survey instrument to help alleviate limitations associated with the survey instrument.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of a study and are within the researcher's control. Catholic school settings were chosen to answer the research questions and provide data to be analyzed within the theoretical frameworks of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Latane and Darley (1970). An additional delimitation of the study was the lack of generalizability of the results to other Catholic schools.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Bullying (face-to-face)*: Face-to-face bullying is “the interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power and display of aggressive behavior repeatedly or with intentional harm doing” (Olweus, 2012, p. 11). Face-to-face bullying is also referred to as traditional or conventional bullying.

*Chat*: A “Synchronous (real time) group communication, with ability to establish private chat” (Willard, 2005, p. 14).

*Cyberaggression*: Aggressive behaviors through a broad range of information and communication technologies, including social networking sites, email, chat program, and text messaging. Cyber aggression includes cyberbullying (Wright & Li, 2013).

*Cyberbullying*: The “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012, p. 32).

*Duty of care*: The expectation that teachers will take reasonable measures to protect students under their care from known risks of injury as well as risks the teacher should have reasonably foreseen.

*Facebook*: A social networking website that allows users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages, and communicate digitally with other registered users.

*Instant Messaging (IM)*: The “synchronous private communications with anyone on a contact or “buddy list.” Teens can have up to 450 “friends” on their “buddy list” (Willard, 2005, p.14).

*In loco parentis*: A Latin term for “in place of the parent” and traditionally gave school officials the same authority to govern students at school as parents did at home. Although the concept has been somewhat diluted since its inception, the *in loco parentis* doctrine still remains applicable (Kemerer & Sansom, 2013).

*Religious Congregation/Private School*: Private elementary or secondary schools associated with specific groups in the Catholic Church.

*Social Media*: Forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content ("Social Media," 2013).

*Social Networking Sites*: Virtual communities where users can create individual public profiles, interact with real-life friends, and meet other people based on shared interests (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011).

*Tweens*: Boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 12.

### **Organization of Dissertation**

This study examined Catholic school teachers' perceptions and legal understanding of cyberbullying. Chapter 1 provided the background to the study, an introduction, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, an overview of the theoretical frameworks used to guide the study, an overview of the methodology to be used, limitations and delimitations, definitions of key terms, and the organization of the study. Chapter 2 presents a synthesis and critical analysis of literature relevant to the research problem and sets the context of the study. The review of the literature includes an investigation of face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying, prevalence of cyberbullying, impact of cyberbullying, teacher perceptions of cyberbullying, teacher responsibilities, legal and policy responses, Catholic schools and the Constitution, and a discussion of the theoretical frameworks. Chapter 3 describes how the quantitative study was conducted including an introduction, the research questions and hypotheses, the research design, variables, procedures, sample and population, instrumentation, validity, reliability, data analysis, assumptions, limitations and delimitations, and ethical assurance. Chapter 4 presents the results along with a discussion of the findings. The



study concludes with Chapter 5, which offers a discussion of the implications of the study's findings and suggestions for future research and professional development.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Bullying**

To understand the phenomenon of bullying in cyberspace, it is important to discuss bullying in the physical world. Bullying is recognized as one of the major problems facing the United States and around the world today (E. Englander, 2013; E. K. Englander, 2013; Jose, Kljakovic, Scheib, & Notter, 2012) and has long been a problem in schools (Glasner, 2010; Olweus, 1993). The United States Department of Education (1998) defined bullying among children as:

intentional, repeated hurtful acts, words or other behavior, such as name-calling, threatening and/or shunning committed by one or more children against another. These negative acts are not intentionally provoked by the victims, and for such acts to be defined as bullying, an imbalance in real or perceived power must exist between the bully and the victim. (p. 1)

A widely-accepted definition of bullying was developed by researcher Dan Olweus (1993), who described bullying as a form of peer aggression involving intentionality, repetition, and power imbalance. More precisely, “A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). Olweus considered physically aggressive acts, verbal insults, relational aggression, social exclusion, isolation, and spreading rumors as forms of bullying.

Bullying has been documented in many cultures and contexts (Jose et al., 2012) with evidence suggesting that bullying can lead to psychological and social struggles, health

problems, increased drop-out rates, and, in extreme situations, suicide. Bullying can have an effect on the person being bullied as well as on the bystanders, parents, families, the school and the wider community (Sullivan, Cleary, & Sullivan, 2004).

Recent bullying cases frequently do not involve physical contact (Englander, 2012). The increase of nonphysical bullying techniques and electronic communications has had an enormous influence on children and bullying behavior. Englander (2012) supported the distinction between face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying in the following statement: “Distinguishing bullying that happens *in an electronic environment* from *in-person* bullying might have some utility and does have some basis in research” (p. 71). Examining both face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying provides a context to help understand cyberbullying and how teachers may help to deal with it effectively (Boulton, Hardcastle, Down, Fowles, & Simmonds, 2013).

### **Cyberbullying**

Researchers debate what constitutes cyberbullying and how cyberbullying is both similar to and different from face-to-face bullying. Previous studies showed discrepancies over how researchers have defined cyberbullying and determined what constituted an act of cyberbullying (S. Hinduja, & Patchin, J., 2009; Mishna, Pepler, & Wiener, 2006). As discussed by Patchin and Hinduja (2012), some researchers have used very broad definitions of the phenomenon of cyberbullying, while others have incorporated very specific types of harm in their definition. A problem with not having a universal definition of cyberbullying is that the inconsistencies have led to different measurements of the nature and extent of harassment in cyberspace, which in turn has led to misinformation and confusion (Mishna et al., 2006). The lack of a clear, precise

definition of what constitutes cyberbullying may lead to misinterpretation by teachers as to when a child has been cyberbullied.

Some researchers have characterized face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying similarly, applying the definitional criteria of intention, repetition of harm, and power imbalance (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012). Extending the definition from face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying has been defined as an aggressive act or behavior that is carried out using electronic means by a group or an individual repeatedly, and over time, against a victim who cannot defend him or herself (Smith et al., 2008). Applying the three traditional criteria to bullying in cyberspace can be challenging. Some of the definitional aspects under debate are repetition and power imbalance (Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2012). Both repetition and power imbalance can be seen as relatively clear for face-to-face bullying but can be difficult when used as criteria for cyberbullying. The idea of repetition within cyberbullying is not as straightforward; one cyberbullying act may escalate out of control of the bully due to technology. A single act by one perpetrator may be repeated many times by others, and experienced many times by the victim within cyberspace. Olweus (1993) referred to power imbalance by describing the victim as physically or psychologically weak. Forms of power imbalance within cyberbullying are not as clearly defined. Neither physical strength nor power imbalance is necessary to cyberbully.

Englander (2013) suggested addressing intent, repetition, and power imbalance in a digital environment from two perspectives; that of the alleged bully and that of the target. These perspectives may be very different. “Assessing for cyberbullying, therefore, relies heavily on the subjective experience of the target – and we need to keep in mind that the existence of a cyberbully victim won’t always imply coexistence of an intentional cyberbully” (E. K.

Englander, 2013, p. 27). In terms of both bullying and cyberbullying, the perspective of the target matters significantly.

One of the first definitions of cyberbullying found in literature was developed by (Belsey, 2004), who defined cyberbullying as “The use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others” (p. 1). (Willard, 2007) defined cyberbullying as “being cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of social aggression using the Internet or other digital technologies” (p. 1). (Peter K. Smith et al., 2008) also included aggression in their definition: “Cyberbullying is reported as an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (p. 23). (Mark & Ratliffe, 2011) considered cyberbullying a form of relational bullying “using digital technology, primarily [involving] name-calling, threats, and spreading rumors, sharing another person’s private information, social isolation, and exclusion” (p. 93). Boulton and colleagues (2013) provided a detailed definition of cyberbullying as “characterized by a subjective perception of being cruelly targeted through electronic means, because although the targets’ experience may definitely feel abusive, the originating incident may lack the intention, repetition and/or power imbalance that traditionally define in-person bullying” (p. 35). Most recently, (Thomas, Connor, & Scott, 2014) classified cyberbullying as a form of cyber-behavior, distinguishing cyberbullying from cyber aggression in that the latter does not include the criteria of power imbalance or repetition. (Elledge et al., 2013) modified Hinduja and Patchin’s (2009) definition by describing cyberbullying as “the repeated harassment of a victim through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices” (p. 699).

A clear definition of cyberbullying is critical for validity in measurement of prevalence, impact, perceptions, and interventions for cyberbullying. Olweus's (1993) definition of face-to-face bullying and the three criterion of repetition, power imbalance, and intent have become the norm for distinguishing between bullying and other forms of aggression (P.K. Smith, 2012). Both Olweus (2013) and Smith and colleagues (2008) supported the use of three criteria in the definition of cyberbullying.

Scholars have argued that the power imbalance within acts of cyberbullying should include media literacy or different levels of technology skills between the bully and the victim (Nocentini et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 2014). However, researchers have disagreed about this requirement, as Huang and Chou (2010) suggested the imbalance of power is nonexistent in cyberspace. Mark and Ratliffe (2011), in turn, argued the power imbalance lies in the anonymity of the perpetrator.

Researchers have suggested that criteria are needed to define cyberbullying more clearly (Menesini et al., 2012; Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013; P.K. Smith, 2012; Thomas et al., 2014). Based on the literature to date, the definition of cyberbullying most likely should use the three criteria of face-to-face bullying, including intent, repetition, and power imbalance, with the incorporation of cyber-specific criteria of anonymity and publicity to gauge the severity of the bullying (Menesini et al., 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 2014). Anonymity occurs when the victim does not know the identity of the perpetrator; this lack of knowledge can intensify feelings of frustration and compound the power imbalance (Nocentini et al., 2010; Slonje et al., 2013). Publicity refers to the cyber act being shared with a large audience or public digital forum as opposed to a private, individual, or smaller audience. Students have reported that

public acts of cyberbullying, such as posting to a webpage or social media site, are considered more serious because of the potentially large public audience (Nocentini et al., 2010; Slonje et al., 2013). Further research suggests the criteria of publicity and anonymity be used to examine the severity of cyberbullying rather than defining criteria.

Without a clear definition of cyberbullying, situations that may require an adult's interventions can escalate into a debate over whether a situation constitutes cyberbullying. This extends into the classroom as well. Even if teachers are made aware of cyberbullying episodes of a particular nature, if the behaviors are not consistent with their definition of cyberbullying, teachers may not sense of responsibility to intervene.

Within the literature, terms used to represent cyberbullying included cyber-harassment, internet harassment, and electronic bullying (Thomas et al., 2014). Additional terms were found internationally, including cyber-mobbing in Germany, virtual bullying in Italy, and harassment via the Internet in Spain (Nocentini et al., 2010), with the term cyberbullying cited most often.

Table 1

*Definitional Criteria of Cyberbullying*

Definition	Criterion		
	Intent to harm	Repetition	Power imbalance
The willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices. <sup>1</sup>	X	X	
The use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others. <sup>2</sup>	X	X	
An aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself. <sup>3</sup>	X	X	X
Intentional behavior aimed at harming another person or persons through computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices, and perceived as aversive by the victim. <sup>4</sup>	X	X	
Cyberbullying is the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others. <sup>5</sup>	X	X	
Being cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of social aggression using the Internet or digital technologies. <sup>6</sup>	X		
Cyberbullying is a form of relational bullying using digital technology, primarily involving name-calling, threats, and spreading rumors, sharing another person's private information, social isolation, and exclusion. <sup>7</sup>	X		
Cyberbullying is characterized by a subjective perception of being cruelly targeted through electronic means. The target's experience may definitely feel abusive, but the originating incident may lack the intention, repetition, and/or power imbalance. <sup>8</sup>			
The repeated harassment of a victim through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices. <sup>9</sup>		X	

1. Hinduja & Patchin, 2012 p. 32.

2. Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008, p. 43.

3. Smith et al. 2008, p. 376.

4. Schoffstall & Cohen, 2011, p. 588.

5. Belsey, 2004, p.2

6. Willard, 2007, p. 1.

7. Mark & Ratliffe, 2011, p. 3.

8. Englander, 2013, p. 354.

9. Elledge et al, 2013, p. 699



## **Prevalence of Cyberbullying**

A precise measure of the prevalence of cyberbullying among students is impossible to determine, partly because the inconsistency in defining cyberbullying, as well as the varied methodological approaches (Sabella, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2013). Some researchers have suggested that the rate of cyberbullying has not increased since it first emerged as a problem (Olweus, 2012; P.K. Smith, 2012); other researchers found an increase over the past five years (Cassidy, Brown, & Jackson, 2012; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2012)

One published study found that 72% of youth have experienced cyberbullying (Juvonen & Gross, 2008), whereas other published research estimated this number at less than 7% (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). According to the National Center for Educational Statistic Indicators of School Crime and Safety (Robers, Kemp, Rathbun, & Morgan, 2014), 9% of students have been cyberbullied. Ybarra et al. (2012) found that 10% of students had been bullied online. A telephone study of 866 US Internet users aged 12 to 17 found that 32% of all teenagers who used the Internet say they had been targets for cyberbullying (Project, 2007). A 2006 poll of 1,000 children conducted by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, found cyberbullying frequencies of 33%. The majority of studies estimated that anywhere from 6% to 30% of teens have experienced some form of cyberbullying.

Research indicated that cyberbullying tended to peak late in middle school or early in high school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). During middle school years, seventh grade was a peak year for cyberbullying incidents (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). This trend was supported by the findings of Friesen, Jonsson, and Persson (2007). In a study of 119 high school students, Friesen and Persson (2007) found that most bullying activities took place between the ages of 10 and 12,

in sixth and seventh grades. Bradshaw, O'Brennan, and Sawyer (2008) found reports of displaying bullying behaviors increased with age as students moved from elementary to middle school years. Wang, Iannotti, and Nansel (2009) found 9.4% of students surveyed in grade six reported being cyberbullied, 9.1% in grade seven, 9.8% in grade eight, and 6% in grade nine. Tokunga (2010) suggested the greatest incidence of cyberbullying occurred at seventh and eighth grades. Both Smith (2012) and Tokunga (2010) suggested adolescence is a peak period for involvement in cyberbullying.

### **Impact of Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying has an impact on the learning environment, health, and well-being of families and communities. While it is noted that cyberbullying occurs most outside of school, it is usually related to incidents that begin at school (Cassidy et al., 2012) and have an impact on the school day (Kowalski, Limber, et al., 2012). Students can be afraid to come to school or go home, for fear of what awaits them on the Internet (Cassidy et al., 2012). Victims and bullies alike have more social, emotional, behavioral, and academic problems than others who are not involved in cyberbullying (Bauman, 2011). The cyberbullying experience is likely to make both bullies and victims feel unsafe in school and uncared for by the teachers (Sourander, 2010) and lead to lower self-esteem and more suicidal thoughts (Patchin, 2010).

Most cyber victims do not notify adults (Campbell, 2005; Kowalski, Limber, et al., 2012). Victims often fear losing access to their digital devices if they inform adults. Victims are also concerned that the cyberbully will retaliate further, and adults could do nothing to stop the victimizations, even if they tried. Cross and colleagues (2009) found that 46% of students who were cyberbullied and told a teacher experienced a worsening situation.

Cyber victimization is associated with a host of negative problems similar to those of face-to-face bullying. Victims of cyberbullying have lower self-esteem, higher levels of depression, and experience significant life challenges (Kowalski, Morgan, & Limber, 2012). Cyberbullying has been related to many health consequences including depression (Kowalski et al., 2008), emotional distress (Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009), and suicide attempts (Kessel Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012).

The psychological and physical problems that emerge with cyberbullying illustrate the serious nature of the phenomenon (Tokunaga, 2010). Cyberbullying issues contribute to increased conflict between students, and the conflict cannot be ignored when the students are at school, regardless of whether the issues are occurring off-campus (Sabella et al., 2013).

Huang and Chou (2010) have argued that the consequences of cyberbullying can be more detrimental than those of face-to-face bullying. Within the discussion of face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying as independent phenomena, Bauman and Newman (2012) contended that the harm caused depends more on the act rather than on how it is delivered. (Lapidot-Lefler & Dolev-Cohen, 2014) characterized face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying as “a single phenomenon which is expressed in two different social spaces in which young people gather and interact: the physical space and cyberspace” (p. 12).

### **Teacher Perceptions of Cyberbullying**

A significant amount of the literature addresses face-to-face school bullying. Contextual parameters of the research are concentrated on students, with a comparatively small and insufficient amount of literature addressing the perspectives of teachers. Literature on face-to-face bullying is slowly expanding to include the phenomena of cyberbullying. As with face-to-

face bullying, the preponderance of the literature examines cyberbullying from the perspective of students, with an inadequate amount of literature available from the teachers' perspective. This paucity is not only limited to teachers' perspectives on cyberbullying but also to their responses to the phenomena in general.

At the time of this study (March 2015), 10 journal articles examining teacher perceptions of cyberbullying had been published. Of the 10 articles, only one study researched teachers in the United States. The remaining studies were conducted in Australia, Canada, Ireland, Israel, Taiwan, and Turkey. Virtually no studies—either in the United States or internationally—were published that examined teacher perceptions in Catholic schools. The gap in literature must be addressed in order for educators to deal more effectively with cyberbullying in schools (Stauffer et al., 2012). This section reviews the literature available in the United States and summarizes international studies on teacher perspectives of cyberbullying. Because limited peer-reviewed literature was available examining teacher perspectives of cyberbullying within the United States, the researcher searched published dissertations and theses within the United States that examined teacher perspectives. After an examination of peer-reviewed articles, the literature review summarizes published dissertations that explored teacher perceptions of cyberbullying.

### **Studies in the United States**

Stauffer and colleagues (2012) conducted a study of 66 high school teachers regarding their perceptions of the effect of cyberbullying on students. The purpose of the study was to evaluate attitudes and perceptions of those most likely to be involved in the routine problems associated with cyberbullying, namely teachers.

The research was conducted in an urban high school in the western United States. Of the 66 high school teachers who participated in the survey, 59% were male and 41% were female. On average, participants had taught 15.5 years. The measure was part of a larger study conducted by the school district to determine teachers' overall perceptions and attitudes with regard to bullying, with cyberbullying as a subset of bullying characteristics. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale to evaluate teachers' perceptions of the severity of cyberbullying in schools, the effect of cyberbullying on victims, where cyberbullying occurs, the perceived need for prevention programs, the effectiveness of prevention strategies, and the likelihood of intervening with a variety of intervention strategies. The end goal was to develop strategies to reduce instances of cyberbullying—both on and off campus.

The first research question of Stauffer and colleagues (2012) examined teachers' general attitudes regarding the impact of cyberbullying on students. Although the majority of teachers' attitudes and perceptions reflected expected teacher responses, one fourth of teachers did not endorse socially desirable responses. For example, 18% of participants indicated they were neutral or agreed with the statement "cyberbullying toughens kids up" (Stauffer et al., 2012). Approximately 25% of participants were either neutral, or did not agree with the statement, "cyberbullying has long-lasting negative effects" (Stauffer et al., 2012). The same percentage indicated they were neutral to or agreed with the statement "cyberbullying prepares students for life" (Stauffer et al., 2012).

The second research question in Stauffer and colleagues (2012) evaluated teachers intervening with specific strategies to address cyberbullying. The results indicated that although teachers were inclined to respond to cyberbullying, they were unsure how they should respond.

Teachers reported that when aware of cyberbullying occurring at school, they were more likely to report incidents to school administrators. Teachers were somewhat likely to talk with the cyberbully and the victim. When cyberbullying occurred away from school, teachers were more undecided about intervening. The results indicated teachers were more likely to ignore cyberbullying if it occurred away from school. Teachers saw themselves as having little or no responsibility to intervene if the cyberbullying occurred away from school.

The third research question Stauffer and colleagues (2012) investigated involved teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of specific prevention strategies for decreasing cyberbullying. In response, 42% reported a need for a formal bully prevention program. However, 49% indicated they were unsure about implementing a formal program. The researchers suggested teachers may be unaware of cyberbullying problems at their school and are not against bully prevention problems in general but are unsure regarding the actual need for this type of program for their students.

The researchers suggested it was possible that teachers did not see it as their responsibility to intervene in response to cyberbullying other than to report the incident to administrators. This becomes especially apparent when cyberbullying occurs away from school. Teachers may also be apprehensive about parental and student retaliation for intervening on behaviors that do not occur specifically at school. Teachers may strongly resist taking on an added responsibility of monitoring and responding to students' cyberbullying that occurs away from school.

The final research question assessed which prevention strategy would be most helpful in reducing cyberbullying. Teachers indicated increased parental involvement, followed by

increased consequences at school. They perceived school-wide antibully assemblies and classroom antibully lessons as being somewhat less helpful as other strategies.

Because the study by Stauffer and colleagues (2012) was conducted in one high school with a relatively small number of participants (66 respondents), caution should be used when generalizing findings to other populations and age groups. Other schools should conduct their own research studies to assess teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying. Policy makers and administrators should be aware of these perceptions and determine ways to help shift teachers' opinions and better equip teachers to take a more active role in monitoring student cyberbullying and intervening with cyberbullying incidents.

Bradshaw et al. (2013) presented a national study that examined teachers' and education support professionals' perspectives on bullying prevention. The survey included 5,064 adults who were members of the National Education Association. The study focused predominantly on traditional face-to-face bullying; however, a number of the survey questions addressed cyberbullying and are considered relative to this study. Teachers in the study indicated being most comfortable with intervening in verbal bullying and least comfortable in intervening in cyberbullying or sexting. Nearly three-fourths of the teachers reported needing additional training related to cyberbullying interventions. The authors indicated, "The empirical research on cyberbullying is still in its infancy – thus relatively little is known about how to effectively intervene and prevent electronic aggression" (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & O'Brennan, 2013, p. 290).

### **International Studies**

Huang and Chou (2013) surveyed 2,821 Taiwanese teachers on their perceptions of cyberbullying among students and their own practices of addressing cyberbullying incidents at

school. The purpose of the study was to identify and explore Taiwanese teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying among students and the relationship between teacher backgrounds and their cyberbullying-related practices. Their findings revealed teachers' tendency to overestimate students' willingness to report cyberbullying. The study also indicated that teachers were not confident in addressing cyberbully incidents, and the authors suggested that training be included in teacher education. The researchers explored the relationship between teachers' sex and grade level taught with cyberbullying-related perceptions. Their findings showed teachers' sex had little difference in relationship to teacher perceptions, but a significant difference was found between the grade level teachers taught and teachers' perceptions.

Huang and Chou (2013) indicated 49% of the teachers considered themselves able to identify cyberbullying. Fewer than half of the teachers thought students would seek help with being cyberbullied; 56% agreed that students would hide the fact they were being cyberbullied. With regard to bystander-related responses, 61% of teachers expressed their perception that any student who would witness or be aware of cyberbullying would report the incident to them. A total of 71% of the teachers considered cyberbullying to have a negative impact on students, and 95% of them considered anticyberbullying guidance necessary; however, 13% of the surveyed teachers had provided relevant guidance to students. Huang and Chou (2013) suggested the results may represent teachers' lack of ability and knowledge regarding how to deal with or how to recognize cyberbullying. The authors proposed that teachers are concerned about cyberbullying, but they may not know how to prevent it. Teachers might also face difficulties in cyberbullying prevention, such as school time, limited administrative support, and lack of



teacher resources. In responding to teachers' willingness to intervene in cyberbullying, 88% of the teachers agreed they would immediately take action, as long as they noticed cyberbullying.

When students do not reveal their victimization themselves, the given teacher must be able to notice the problem; and teachers, as found in the present study, are likely to overestimate student's willingness to report cyberbullying. School teachers need an acute sensibility and awareness to notice aggressive behaviors in cyberspace and to identify offending parties.

Discrepancies might exist in perceptions of cyberbullying across different cultures. Teachers and students within the Chinese cultural context might judge and react to aggressive behaviors in cyberspace based on different values from those in Western cultures. In Taiwan, where the law has stringent mandates for sanctions on students, teachers may find it difficult to address cyberbullying. What a teacher considers an acceptable form of discipline for cyberbullying may be considered abusive under the Taiwanese law (Huang & Chou, 2013). Addressing bullying incidents can be a difficult and troublesome task for teachers, but with training and support, they can be more confident and feel greater willingness in undertaking the task.

It is critical to note that cyberbullying might be highly context-dependent and influenced by a particular community's education system, school climate, and cultural norms (Huang & Chou, 2013). Therefore, one should not interpret cyberbullying in Taiwan without first taking into consideration the influence of Chinese values and Taiwanese teenagers' specific and sometimes uniquely specific use of certain technologies. Taiwanese place high value on goals derived from Confucianism, including academic achievement, community-based social harmony, and respect for teachers. Many Taiwanese people consider it culturally acceptable for teachers to

practice hierarchal, authoritative, disciplinary methods in the classroom. Because this acceptance is not typical of all cultures, the current study's findings implications are not necessarily generalizable to other cultural contexts.

In Canada, Li (2008) examined preservice teachers' perceptions and understandings about cyberbullying. Preservice teachers are those who have participated in their field experience during their teacher preparation program. Preservice teachers in Canada participate in a practicum that involves teaching in a classroom under the supervision of a mentor teacher. The research questions in Li's (2008) study addressed the extent to which preservice teachers were concerned about cyberbullying, how confident they were in managing cyberbullying problems, the extent to which preservice teachers felt prepared to deal with cyberbullying, and the extent to which teachers thought school commitment was important. A sample of 154 preservice teachers enrolled in a teacher education program in a Canadian university provided the data for the analysis. A quantitative survey of 26 items divided between demographic data and perceptions about cyberbullying was distributed. The findings indicated that 32% of teachers agreed cyberbullying was a problem in schools. The sample showed that 66% agreed children are affected by cyberbullying and 50% were concerned about cyberbullying. When asked about confidence in relating to cyberbullying, 13% agreed they could identify cyberbullying, and 11% were confident in managing cyberbullying. The results further indicated that although a majority of the preservice teachers understood the significant effects of cyberbullying and were concerned about cyberbullying, they did not think it was a problem in schools. Li (2008) suggested although research identified cyberbullying as a serious problem in school systems, a majority of the preservice teachers were not aware of the significance of the problem. Additionally, the

findings indicated a vast majority of the teachers did not feel confident in addressing cyberbullying, although their concern was high. They did not know how to identify the problem or how to manage it when it occurred. It is important for teachers to develop knowledge and skills about cyberbullying, which in turn, will increase their confidence (Li, 2008). Only 3% of the participating preservice teachers indicated they had received training to manage cyberbullying—although most of them had shown a desire to learn about it in their university education (P.K. Smith, 2012).

Eden, Heiman, and Olenik-Shemesh (2013) surveyed 328 elementary, middle, and high school teachers in Israel regarding their perceptions, beliefs, and concerns about cyberbullying. The researchers used Li's (2008) questionnaire of preservice teachers, adapting it to in-service teachers and adding questions relevant to authors' research. The modified questionnaire included four indexes regarding teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, teachers' confidence in managing cyberbullying problems, teachers' beliefs in school's commitment to deal with cyberbullying, and teachers' belief in the importance of learning about cyberbullying. Teachers' sex, education level, and age of the students they taught affected their level of concern about cyberbullying. Female teachers—compared to male teachers—exhibited a significantly greater concern about cyberbullying and a stronger belief that school was committed to intervening in incidences of cyberbullying. Moreover, special education teachers were more concerned than mainstream teachers about cyberbullying. Results showed significant differences between teachers who taught in elementary school and teachers who taught in high school and their concerns about cyberbullying. Perceptions of teachers in middle school fell between the two groups. The study revealed the following pattern: teachers who had been victims of cyberbullying were more

affected and anxious about cyberbullying compared to teachers who had not been cyberbullied. Their findings indicated that teachers were concerned about the issue of cyberbullying; their confidence in managing cyberbullying problems was low, and they universally believed schools should become involved in the study and research of cyberbullying. Eden and colleagues (2013), in conjunction with Li (2008), identified the need for teacher education to include information about cyberbullying. The findings suggested a need to design and implement appropriate actions to prevent cyberbullying.

Ryan, Kariuki, and Yilmaz (2011) conducted a survey comparing 241 Canadian preservice teachers to 163 preservice teachers in Turkey in their perceptions of cyberbullying. The survey used a modified version of Li's (2008) cyberbully survey. Both Turkish and Canadian teachers agreed that cyberbullying was a problem in their schools and affected both teachers and students. Educators in both nations agreed that cyberbullying affected students; however, Turkish educators believed they could identify and manage cyberbullying to a greater extent compared to Canadian respondents. The survey further indicated a need for acceptable-use policies including online use and behavior both on and off-campus.

In Canada, Cassidy and colleagues (2012) conducted a survey of 17 educators of students ages 13 to 18. Overall, the study indicated that teachers were unaware of the extent of cyberbullying among their students. Although the surveyed teachers saw prevention as a priority, no policies or programs with regard to cyberbullying had been implemented by any of the surveyed teachers. The study indicated that a school district's focus on technology did not necessarily lead to educating teachers about the use or misuse of technology.

In Turkey, Yilmaz (2010) conducted a study of 163 preservice teachers. The survey indicated that 83% of the preservice teachers were aware of the negative effects of cyberbullying on students. Although teachers were aware of cyberbullying, results indicated that teachers were not confident in dealing with cyberbullying. Similar to Li's (2008) research, respondents indicated that schools need to develop policies and programs for both teachers and school administrators to promote cyberbullying awareness and preventive strategies. The survey further indicated that preservice teachers were encouraged to integrate technology into their curriculum; however, 79% of respondents wanted to learn more about cyberbullying because they did not believe their university education covered cyberbullying. These results were similar to those reported by Li (2008).

In Ireland, Mannix-McNamara and Moyinhan (2010) surveyed 274 teachers regarding their attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and skills in dealing with cyberbullying. Although 90% of teachers indicated they were aware of cyberbullying, only 8% percent felt capable of resolving incidences of cyberbullying to the satisfaction of all involved. Overall, the study indicated that although teachers were aware of cyberbullying, they felt a need for professional development in order to respond to student needs. The study also indicated the need to explore consequences of cyberbullying when originating off-campus. "Even though cyberbullying actions may occur outside school, the motivation to engage in that action may have had its genesis within the school and certainly the impact of the behavior infiltrates the relationship within the school" (McNamara & McNamara, 2010, p. 8).

Compton, Campbell, and Mergler (2014) investigated teachers', parents', and students' perceptions of bullying and the motivation for engaging in both cyberbullying and traditional

face-to-face bullying. The qualitative exploratory study was conducted in a large city in Australia and used focus groups that included a total of 35 participants, 11 of whom were teachers. The teachers taught year nine students—13 to 15 year-old students. Results of the study showed that in understanding the definition of cyberbullying, teachers did not include the three key components found in traditional face-to-face definitions (i.e., intent to harm, repetition, and imbalance of power). Teachers only recognized intent to harm as a factor in cyberbullying. When asked what motivates students to engage in cyberbullying, the prominent theme from teachers was an avoidance of punishment or retaliation, founded on the premise that students say things on the Internet they would not necessarily say in person. One teacher described cyberbullying as “smarter bullying” (Compton et al., 2014, p. 392).

### **Dissertations**

Because only one peer-reviewed article was available that explored teacher perceptions of cyberbullying within the United States, the researcher reviewed two published dissertations and theses that explored teacher perceptions of cyberbullying within the United States. The first of these studies, by Graves (2013), was a qualitative case study exploring the perceptions of technically proficient middle school teachers regarding how they defined, prevented, recognized, and handled incidence of cyberbullying. Results indicated that teachers were confident in their ability to define cyberbullying and their ability to recognize cases of cyberbullying. Teachers who considered themselves experts in using technology in their classrooms saw themselves as able to handle cyberbullying effectively. Defined discipline measures were established to allow teachers to feel empowered by administration to discipline students who cyberbullied. Teachers acknowledged that their past experience with bullying affected how they handled cyberbullying.

Respondents indicated that they were unsure of the exact number of cases of cyberbullying within their school and would like further training on how to effectively handle incidences of cyberbullying.

Noah (2012) conducted a qualitative case study of six middle school teachers and three school leaders regarding their knowledge of cyberbullying, their experiences managing cyberbullying, their confidence in addressing cyberbullying, and their perceptions of their role in preventing and responding to cyberbullying. Results indicated that teachers lacked a clear understanding of the prevalence of cyberbullying at their school. Furthermore, although teachers perceived themselves as having a definite role in preventing and responding to cyberbullying, there was not a clear understanding of the procedures for addressing cyberbullying on campus. Table 2 presents a summary of the literature.

Table 2

*Summary of Literature - Teacher Perceptions of Cyberbullying*

Source	Date	Setting	Sample size	Grade level
Cassidy, W., Brown, K., & Jackson, M. "Under the radar": Educators and Cyberbullying in schools.	2012	Canada	17	9–12
Huang, Y., & Chou, C. (2013). Revisiting cyberbullying: Perspectives from Taiwanese Teachers.	2013	Taiwan	2,821	4–12
Ryan, T., Kariuki, M., & Yilmaz, H. (2011). A comparative analysis of cyberbullying perceptions of pre-service educators: Canada and Turkey.	2011	Canada Turkey	584	Preservice
Stauffer, S., Heath, M. A., Coyne, S.M., & Ferrin, S. (2012). High school teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying prevention and intervention strategies.	2012	United States	66	9–12
Yilmaz, H. (2010). An examination of pre-service teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying.	2010	Turkey	163	Preservice
Li, Q. (2008). Cyberbullying in schools: An examination of pre-service teachers' perceptions.	2008	Canada	154	Preservice
Ayas, T., & Horzum, B. (2011). Exploring the teachers' cyber bullying perception in terms of various variables.	2011	Turkey	140	Translation incomplete
Mannix-McNamara, P., & Moyinhan, S. (2010). Teachers' experiences, perceptions of and skills in addressing cyber bullying in Irish schools.	2010	Ireland	274	9–12
Eden, S., Heiman, T., & Olenik-Shemesh, D. (2013). Teacher perceptions, beliefs and concerns about cyberbullying.	2013	Israel	328	K–12
Compton, L., Campbell, M., & Mergler, A. (2014). Teacher, parent and student perceptions of the motives of cyberbulies.	2014	Australia	11	8–10
Noah, T. O. (2012). <i>Middle school teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying.</i>	2012	United States	6	6 - 8
Graves, T. N. (2013). <i>Bridging the divide: A case study investigating digitally-wise teacher perceptions of middle school cyberbullying.</i>	2013	United States	7	6 - 8



## **Teacher Responsibilities**

Similar to face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying involves complex relationships among students. Frequent interaction with students places teachers in a good position to view the interwoven relationships of those involved in cyberbullying (Huang & Chou, 2013). Because cyberbullying occurs inside and outside of schools, teachers can play an important role in addressing the problem of cyberbullying (Li, 2008). Negative effects on cyber victims can directly or indirectly impact student learning; therefore, teachers need to be prepared to deal with the issue of cyberbullying (Li, 2008). Teachers are at the forefront of coping with students' learning behavior problems, and it is the teacher's responsibility to create a safe learning environment.

Teachers have a position of power and authority in which they are responsible for classroom expectations, monitoring student behavior, and imposing positive and negative consequences for behavior. For this reason, an understanding of teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying is critically important. (Stauffer et al., 2012, p. 12)

At a fundamental level, teachers need to keep pace with new technology to understand how students communicate online and how cyberbullying happens. "Teachers are uniquely positioned to affect change in the processes that maintain bullying as they are the adults most proximal to and knowledgeable about school bullying problems" (Elledge et al., 2013, p. 700). However, the result of one study indicated school administrators and staff provided limited help in situations of cyberbullying; (Li, 2010) suggested that the reluctance may have been caused by the adults' lack of understanding and training in how to deal with the issue of cyberbullying. Boulton and colleagues (2013) explained that teachers should address cyberbullying in the same

manner as face-to-face bullying by demanding emphatic responses and intervention; however, their findings indicated that teachers were less confident in coping with cyberbullying in comparison to face-to-face bullying. Schools should take an active stance against bullying including educating teachers to recognize the signs and to intervene in bullying (Glasner, 2010). “Due to the growing relevance and seriousness of the problem [cyberbullying] at hand, those on the proverbial front lines must proactively work to equip themselves with the knowledge and strategies to preempt grave harm” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010, p. 207). Teachers need to understand the significant implications of cyberbullying as well as possess the ability to identify and handle cyberbullying incidents (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

Teachers are increasingly confronted with cyberbullying situations they may feel ill-equipped to handle. It is imperative that teachers draw upon research to inform their understanding of the problem of cyberbullying and to employ evidence-based solutions in their design of prevention and intervention strategies. Understanding the nature, impact, prevention, and intervention strategies for cyberbullying will aid in the development of appropriate policies and practices (Cassidy et al., 2012).

Because teachers have a significant amount of interaction with students during the day and are often perceived as role models as well as educators (Grumm & Hein, 2013), the way that teachers respond to bullying is very important. According to Olweus (1994), it is important for teachers to explain to students that all forms of bullying behaviors, including cyberbullying, are not tolerated, and consequences will be issued if bullying occurs.

As students continue to incorporate the Internet into their daily lives, teachers must develop strategies to recognize signs of cyberbullying and to intervene as a duty of care before

children's welfare and learning are negatively affected. However, according to Shariff (2009), the typical reaction of teachers to cyberbullying is that it is not their place to get involved in disputes over online expression, especially if it originated off campus. As such, Shariff (2009) observed that teachers are not "Implementing their common-law duty of care, *in loco parentis*, to protect and educate their students about civil responsibility" (p. 67).

A special duty exists between schools and students in which school authorities and teachers are expected to care for the safety and well-being of students in their custody. Duty of care requires schools to take reasonable measures to prevent foreseeable risks to safely care and support their students.

The consensus of case law is that schools have a duty to care for all students "during compulsory hours and non-compulsory hours to prevent any unreasonably foreseeable risk of harm" (Terando, 2011). However, the specific limits of a school's duty of care have not been clearly defined by the courts. The increasing expansion of Internet communication technologies and digital access is extending the duty of care beyond the schoolhouse gate (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). It is assumed that within their duty of care, teachers should reasonably foresee that students could be damaged from cyberbullying and that teachers should take reasonable preventative steps to stop cyberbullying from harming a student.

### **Responsibilities in Catholic schools**

Along with their duty of care, teachers in Catholic schools are charged with the principle of Christian personalism. "The extended role for teachers arises as a deliberate enactment of the principle of Christian personalism, set in the context of the larger social justice mission of the school" (Bryk et al., 1993, p. 142). Personalism is characterized by the social relations and

solidarity that support interactions and relationships within a just and caring community. It derives meaning from individual and social change imbedded in social engagement. Bryk and colleagues (1993) discussed the social engagement within the Catholic school community as encompassing three factors: opportunities for face-to-face interaction and shared experiences among students and teachers; the extended scope of the role of the teachers; and shared beliefs. Shared beliefs and norms within a Catholic school community form the foundation for communal organization and how people should relate to one another.

Underpinning these specific beliefs is a set of general moral commitments. The Catholic school sees itself as a community that respects the dignity of each person, where members are free to questions within a commitment to genuine dialog, and where an ethos of caring infuses social encounters. (Bryk et al., 1993, p. 299)

Catholic schools emphasize the pursuit of peace and social justice. This entails Christian personalism and solidarity. Christian personalism is the mandate to recognize the “humaneness” of people. Within Catholic schools, this mandate extends to teachers and staff, requiring them to recognize the kind of people students become, as well as the academics they achieve.

“Personalism is a communal norm for the school – the kind of behavior modeled by the teachers and held out as an ideal for students . . . it signifies a moral conception of social behavior in a just community” (Bryk et al., 1993, p. 301). Bryk and colleagues (1993) contended that education within a Catholic school encompasses the concept of a Catholic social ethic.

An education [that] involves nurturing both mind and spirit, with equal concern for what students know and for whether they develop the disposition to use their intellectual capacities to effect a greater measure of social justice. This is a Catholic conception of an

education of value for human development and democratic citizenship. (Bryk et al., 1993, p. 301)

The concepts of a social ethic and shared values of caring and social justice grounded in Catholic school ideology shape the actions of its members—both students and teachers (Bryk et al., 1993). “For teachers, meaning is found in the lives they touch and the larger social justice mission in which their work is imbedded” (Bryk et al., 1993, p. 306). Catholic schools require that the dignity of every person in the classroom be safeguarded from disrespect or intimidating behavior by teachers or other students (Fourre, 2003).

Within the discussion of communication in the digital age, teachers in Catholic schools are called to “Boldly become citizens of the digital world” (Francis, 2014, p. 8) while also being concerned with humanity and the dignity of every human person. “It follows that there exists a Christian way of being present in the digital world: this takes the form of a communication which is honest and open, responsible and respectful of others” (Benedict XVI, 2011, p. 16).

What is it, then, that helps us, in the digital environment, to grow in humanity and mutual understanding? We need . . . to recover a certain sense of deliberateness and calm. We will also learn to appreciate more fully the important values inspired by Christianity, such as the vision of the human person . . . the proper distinction between the religious and political spheres, the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity and many others. (Francis, 2014, p. 576)

### **Legal and Policy Responses**

The law has many functions; it can be used as a deterrent, provide direction for assigning punishment, determine reasonable compensation to victims, gauge societal norms, and influence

policy making (Campbell, 2013). Incidents of cyberbullying can be evaluated within different areas of the law, including criminal, statutory, and civil law.

Cases of cyberbullying victimization are more complex because different laws exist in different countries, states, and regions. In the United States, 49 states have legislation addressing school bullying; of these, 19 specifically prohibit cyberbullying, and five additional states have proposed language to include cyberbullying. Forty-nine states include electronic harassment policies, and in 13 state laws, schools are given jurisdiction over off-campus cyber actions that interfere with the learning environment of the school. Some states have also enacted legislation making cyberbullying a crime, or at least a misdemeanor (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014).

The State of California regulations and the Education Code offer some directives that can guide school personnel in addressing incidences of cyberbullying. California Assembly Bill 256 Chapter 700 Section 48900 of the Education Code (October 2013) amended Education Code section 48900 to clarify that students may be suspended or expelled for bullying by means of an electronic act, regardless of where the cyberbullying originates. The Education Code now includes a definition of an electronic to include the creation and transmission of messages, images, and sounds both on and off school sites.

California Assembly Bill 9, also referred to as Seth's Law, (July 2012) reinforced and expanded the "Safe Place to Learn Act" to help safeguard all public school students. Seth's Law was named after a 13-year-old California student who committed suicide after being bullied at school. The bill expanded the definition of bullying and connected it to academic performance.

California Assembly Bill 746, Chapter 72 (July 2011), the "Cyberbullying Prevention Bill," incorporated language to include student behaviors on social networking web sites. It

stated that posts made on social network sites are covered under the Education Code antibullying provisions and allows school officials to suspend student violators.

School administrators are dealing with more cases of cyberbullying and have limited legal advice or precedent to aid them in their decision making. Responding to cyberbullying can be challenging; unlike face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying frequently originates off campus, but the consequences can surface at school. Although there is little uncertainty about the effects cyberbullying can inflict upon schools, school administrators are in a state of ambiguity as they attempt to determine the legalities of addressing cyberbullying issues occurring off campus. With extended boundaries to enforce, schools are faced with challenges that have been at the heart of many student and school debates for decades: preserving the balance between students' rights to free speech as defined by the First Amendment, and the preservation of student safety and a quality learning environment free from disruption (Shariff, 2009a; Willard, 2007).

It is difficult to achieve a balance when navigating between stakeholder rights and interests in physical and virtual space. Yet at no time has it been more important to reconceptualize the way we understand and deliver knowledge, administer schools, or apply certain rules and laws to manage the "commons" of physical and cyberspace all at once. (Shariff, 2009b, p. 213)

Balancing students' freedom of expressions with students' rights to a safe learning environment has resulted in numerous cases of litigation brought upon the school system and administrators by students and their families. Case law, state, and federal requirements leave school district leaders with inconsistent rulings and no guidance. Cyberbullying cases involving similar scenarios have received opposing rulings by the same court, which has educators and

legal experts looking to the US Supreme Court for direction (Davis, 2011). However, the Supreme Court has provided no directive for cases of cyberbullying brought to the courts, and the lower courts have been inconsistent in their rulings when applying the four landmark First Amendment cases.

### **US Supreme Court Decisions**

The four US Supreme Court cases that supply the legal direction to evaluate free expression rights of students are *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969), *Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser* (1986), *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* (1988), and *Morse v. Frederick* (2007).

*Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969) was the most influential case addressing student speech. In this case, students were initially suspended from school for wearing black arm bands in protest of the United States involvement in the Vietnam War. The US Supreme Court ruled in favor of the students' rights to protest because the wearing of the arm bands neither presented a threat to other students nor created a disruptive learning environment at the school. The Court determined that for school districts to restrict student expression of controversial or inflammatory opinions, schools must demonstrate that such behaviors substantially interfere with school or collide with the rights of others. The Court ruling does not explicitly address speech that originates off campus. *Tinker* has been used as precedent for many other cases involving schools' intervention of student expression and is commonly referred to as the *Tinker* standard.

*Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser* (1986) dealt with a student who gave a speech on campus using sexual innuendos and metaphors. After the student was suspended for violating



the school's code of conduct, the father filed suit based on a violation of the student's First Amendment rights. The US Supreme Court upheld the student's suspension, ruling that the student speech was considered "indecent, lewd, and offensive speech." The Court clarified that similar speech may be protected for adults, but that minors are not granted the same protections if such speech is considered highly offensive.

*Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* (1988) dealt with students who wrote and edited the school-sponsored newspaper of the high school. In reviewing proofs for the newspaper, the principal found two articles to be inappropriate and ordered the articles not to be published. Students brought the case to court claiming a violation of the First Amendment. The Supreme Court ruled the school could exercise editorial control if the activity was considered to be school sponsored, and if the school could prove the activity was related to legitimate pedagogical goals.

*Morse v. Frederick* (2007), the most recent US Supreme Court case pertaining to student expression, upheld regulation of speech that was not specifically on campus. While off campus at a school-sponsored event, a student displayed a banner that read "BONG HITS 4 JESUS." The teacher instructed the student to take down the banner. The student refused and was subsequently suspended. The student then filed suit claiming a violation of First Amendment free speech. The US Supreme Court ruled student speech that advocates illegal drug use at a school-sponsored event is unprotected by the First Amendment.

The landmark US Supreme Court cases do not deal with Internet speech, but they do establish the foundation for student speech. In circumstances when electronic expression is a true threat, obscene, or defamatory, school authorities can restrict such expression without infringing on students' First Amendment rights (McCarthy, 2014).

## **Selected Lower Court Decisions**

Lower courts have struggled to apply the *Tinker* standard to online speech that originates off campus. “In determining whether the speech can be regulated, lower courts have considered factors such as substantial school disruption, foreseeability that the speech would reach campus, the actual place of the speech’s reception, and the intent of the speaker” (Dranoff, 2013, p. 652).

In two very similar cases, *Layshock v. Hermitage School District* (2010) and *J.S ex rel. Snyder v. Blue Mountain School District* (650 F.3d 915, 2010), two students, while off campus and using private computers, created offensive and vulgar parodies of their school principals on MySpace. Both students were suspended and in each case, the student sued for violations of their First Amendment rights after being disciplined. In *Layshock v. Hermitage School District*, the Third Circuit panel court ruled in favor of the student; in *J.S ex rel. Snyder v. Blue Mountain School District*, a different Third Circuit panel court found in favor of the school district. In 2011, each case went to the full Third Circuit Court of Appeals, which ruled in both cases that school officials cannot punish off-campus speech when the speech would not foreseeably cause substantial disruption.

In *Doninger v. Niehoff*, 642 F.3d 334, 357 (2d Cir. 2011), a student was prevented from running for student government after posting a vulgar blog off campus that encouraged students to complain to school administrators about a schedule change. Students who supported the blogger had planned to wear t-shirts in support of the blogger’s First Amendment rights to a school assembly, but they were prevented from doing so. In contrast to *Layshock v. Hermitage School District* and *J.S ex rel. Snyder v. Blue Mountain School District*, the court ruled in favor of the school authorities and upheld the disciplinary actions.

In *Kowalski v. Berkeley County Schools* (652 F.3d 565, 2011), a student created a MySpace page and discussion group that mocked another classmate. The student who created the page was suspended for 10 days and placed on a 90-day social suspension. The student sued, alleging the school district violated her First Amendment rights and claimed cruel and unusual punishment. Applying both prongs of *Tinker*, the court ruled in favor of the school, stating the attack on a classmate interfered with the rights of another student and therefore was disruptive of the educational process.

In *Wynar v. Douglas County School District* (728 F.3d 1062, 2013), the Ninth Circuit held that school officials can discipline students for off-campus electronic communications. The case involved a student who used MySpace to send threatening messages with details of a planned school shooting. The court ruled that a student's violent and threatening off-campus electronic speech was not protected by the First Amendment.

In *J.S. v. Bethlehem Area School District* (2002), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court upheld the punishment of a student who created a website that listed reasons why his teacher should die, depicted his teacher with a severed head, and solicited donations for hiring a hit man to kill his teacher. The court ruled that the speech was not protected because it was considered a serious threat, causing major disruption to the school.

In *Emmett v. Kent School District No. 415* (2000), the Western District of Washington overturned the school's discipline of a student who had created a website depicting fake obituaries for students. The court ruled that the speech was off-campus, not connected to any school-sponsored activity, and not substantially disruptive.

In *Wisniewski v. Board of Education of Weedsport Central School District* (2007), the Second Circuit upheld the suspension of a student who created a threatening instant messaging icon depicting a gun firing a bullet at a person's head. Below the picture was a statement to kill the student's teacher. Although the icon was entirely created and distributed from the student's home, the court held the administrators could reasonably foresee that the icon could cause a substantial disruption at the school, and the suspension was justified.

In *J.C. ex rel. R.C. v. Beverly Hills Unified School District* (2010), the Central District of California overturned the punishment of a student who posted and publicized a YouTube video in which the student and her friends describe another classmate as "a slut," "spoiled," and "the ugliest piece of shit I've ever seen in my whole life." Although the target of the online video was a student, the court did not see evidence of a material and substantial disruption.

With the variance in lower court decisions and the lack of direction from the US Supreme Court, school administrators struggle with interpreting legal principles. Many states have laws that specifically address cyberbullying, often requiring schools and districts to adopt anticyberbullying policies and programs, without providing guidance or funding to do so.

Table 3

*Summary of U.S. Supreme Court and Selected Lower Court Decisions*

<b>Case</b>	<b>Court</b>	<b>Decision</b>
<i>Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District</i>	U.S. Supreme Court	Student expression can be restricted if it creates a substantial disruption or collides with the rights of others
<i>Bethel School District v. Fraser</i>	U.S. Supreme Court	Student expression can be restricted if it is lewd, vulgar or offensive expression
<i>Hazelwood School District et al. v. Kuhlmeier</i>	U.S. Supreme Court	Student expression that represents the school can be restricted
<i>Morse v. Fredericak</i>	U.S. Supreme Court	Student expression promoting illegal activity can be restricted
<i>Layshock v. Hermitage School District</i>	Third Circuit Court	Student expression cannot be restricted if it originates off campus and does not cause a substantial disruption
<i>J.S. ex rel. Snyder v. Blue Mountain School District</i>	Third Circuit Court	Student expression cannot be restricted if it originates off campus and does not cause a substantial disruption
<i>Doninger v. Niehoff</i>	Second Circuit Court	Student expression can be restricted if it might disrupt school operations
<i>Kowalski v. Berkeley County Schools</i>	Fourth Circuit Court	Student expression can be restricted if the speech is considered harassment, bullying, or intimidation
<i>Wynar v. Douglas County School District</i>	Ninth Circuit Court	Student expression can be restricted if there is an identifiable threat of school violence
<i>J.S. v. Bethlehem Area School District</i>	Pennsylvania Supreme Court	Student expression can be restricted if it is threatening
<i>Emmett v. Kent School District</i>	Washington State District Court	Student expression that originates off-campus cannot be restricted if it is not considered disruptive.
<i>Wisniewski v. Board of Education</i>	Second Circuit Court	Student expression can be restricted if it is foreseen as substantially disruptive
<i>J.C. v. Beverly Hills Unified School District</i>	Central District of California	Student expression that is not disruptive cannot be restricted

## **Catholic Schools and the Constitution**

Public schools in the United States were created to provide all students with equal opportunities to develop their intellectual, social, and moral capabilities to enable them to contribute to the common good and act as an “integrative influence on society” (Hallinan & Kubitschek, 2012). Public schools are controlled by publicly elected or appointed officials and are supported through public funds. As such, public schools are considered government agents and have subsequent responsibilities and rights. This includes being subject to First Amendment limits.

Individuals incorrectly assume that students’ constitutional rights are recognized in private schools, similar to public schools. The Constitution, particularly the Bill of Rights, dictates what the government must do, not what private institutions must do (Shaughnessy, 2009). Catholic schools in the United States, unlike public schools, are not typically supported by public funds and are not considered government agents. There are no federal constitutional responsibilities and rights within Catholic schools, including First Amendment limits, unless there is sufficient state action in the schools.

Four theories are used to determine if sufficient involvement with the government, that is, state action, is present to establish constitutional liability: state entanglement; state or public function; symbiotic relationship; and entwinement (Mawdsley, 2012). Litigants have unsuccessfully drawn from these four theories to argue state action in situations involving receipt of state or federal assistance, accreditation or state licensure, granting state charter, certification of teachers, tax exemption, filing state forms, performance of a public function (education), establishing policies required by government, meeting state minimum education standards, state

inspection and regulations, and service of government officials on governing boards (Mawdsley, 2012). Courts have consistently disregarded these examples as indicators of state action. A prominent case that attempted to use the state action argument was *Rendell-Baker v. Kohn* (1982), which involved teachers who were discharged from a private school. The private school provided an education to students with drug, alcohol, and behavioral problems. The school accepted student referrals from the public school district and received nearly 99% of its operating budget from state and federal funds. The court ruled the termination of the employees was “not compelled or even influenced by any state regulation” and further determined the actions of the private school could not be treated as a public school. To date (March 2015), no plaintiff has been successful in using the state action argument against a private school.

The law is not the same in public and private schools. Catholic schools, while typically not subject to constitutional limits, are subject to terms of contracts between parents, students, and the school. These contracts allow school authorities more options in dealing with behavior and speech, both on and off school grounds. Catholic schools can have rules that would not be allowed in the public sector.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework informed by established theory and empirical facts helps to guide research. “A theoretical basis is essential not only for uncovering the influential factors involved in a cyberbullying event but also for designing assessment measures and interventions that effectively target personal and environmental factors involved in cyberbullying victimization and perpetration” (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014, p. 1110). Currently researchers do not have a unified theoretical framework that informs the field of cyberbullying.

Previous studies on cyberbullying used a variety of frameworks including social learning theory by Albert Bandura (1973), sociocultural theory by Lev Vygotsky (1978), and social ecological theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). Kowalski and colleagues (2014) suggested the use of the general aggression model to understand the situational factors of cyberbullying. Shariff (2004) proposed the use of James Burn's (1978) model of transformational leadership to recognize the challenges of educators who are confronted with cyberbullying. Shariff (2004) further suggested incorporating Nell Nodding's (2011) work on the ethics of care as a foundation for responding to both face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying. Espelage, Polanin, and Low (2014) suggested cyberbullying perpetration could be explained by individual and family characteristics and suggested that the social ecological theory could provide direction. Espelage and Swearer (2004) adapted Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological theory to explain conventional bullying as a complicated social exchange among different systems including individuals, family, peer groups, schools, community, and culture.

This research study was guided by two theoretical frameworks: the social ecological theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) and bystander intervention theory proposed by Latane and Darley (1970). The first theoretical framework, Bronfenbrenner's social ecological theory, provided the foundation for the study, situating the teacher within the microsystem and providing a means for understanding the interaction of teachers' perceptions and legal understandings of cyberbullying within the school environment. The second theory, Latane and Darley's bystander intervention theory, served as the primary framework to help contextualize the findings that surfaced during this study. Both frameworks provided a lens for examining Catholic school teachers' understandings of the law governing cyberbullying, their concerns,



their perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, and their perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying.

### **Social Ecological Theory**

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological theory provided a model of interactive systems of human beings that shape how human development is affected by the social ecology. Within the ecological systems theory, the ecological environment is conceived as a set of systems nested within other systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the ecological environment as "a set of nested structures, each inside the next" (p. 3).

Based on the social ecological systems model, the impact of a cyberbullying on a student in one setting will resonate throughout the interconnected settings. A teacher's response to cyberbullying will impact not only the school setting but the family as well. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) suggested that environmental influences such as a child's home, school, community and culture, combine to influence the child's behavior and social interactions.

The social ecological model includes four nested settings that work together to influence and shape the life of a child. The model sets the child in the center of the nested settings with each system having the ability to directly or indirectly impact the child. The systems include the microsystem (the immediate setting where the child interacts); the mesosystem (two interacting microsystems); the exosystem (external environments); and the macrosystem (larger cultural influences). Bronfenbrenner later added a fifth setting, the chronosystem, to explain the progression of the systems over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2004).

As noted by Campbell (2013), bullying in all forms, including cyberbullying, is a social relationship problem that is ingrained within our society. Because students spend so much time

at school where their social relationships function, society considers schools to be responsible for intervening and developing solutions to the problem of bullying. The school is also presumed to be responsible when the behavior is conducted outside of school hours and outside of school grounds, as in the case of cyberbullying (Campbell, 2013). Although putting the onus completely on schools and teachers is not a realistic solution to a societal problem, teachers can play a pivotal role in reducing cyberbullying.

All forms of bullying do not solely involve a dual relationship between a student who bullies and a target, but instead involve social systems within, and extended from, the relationships of those involved. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theoretical framework on ecological systems suggests that students who are involved in bullying, and by extension, cyberbullying, are influenced by their peers, families, school communities, and countries in which they live. Solutions to reduce, and ultimately prevent, bullying and cyberbullying must involve not only individuals and schools but also governments in the form of legislation, and national and state stakeholders in the form of policies, to prevent and intervene in cyberbullying (Campbell, 2013).

**Microsystem.** Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems analysis suggested that assessments of cyberbullying and peer victimization need to consider the microsystem of the individual—the immediate environments such as home, classroom, and school, as well as the relationship dynamics occurring within these environments. Both the microsystem environment and the relationship dynamics are important targets for bullying and cyberbullying intervention.

The impact of the socializing role of the school was recognized in the ecological model of childhood development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Due to frequent interactions between students and teachers in school, teachers might reinforce bullying and cyberbullying behaviors

by failing to promote respectful interactions among students or take disciplinary action against bullying or other related misbehaviors.

Yoon, Bauman, Choi, and Hutchinson (2011) suggested teachers play a critical role in decreasing bullying. Yoon and colleagues' (2011) study, which focused on the characteristics, awareness, and problem solving strategies for bullying and peer victimization, concluded that students involved in bullying situations need to develop a close relationship with teachers, and there is a critical need for teachers to be involved in responding to bullying situations. Research findings lend empirical support for the importance of teachers' role in addressing bullying and cyberbullying situations. A close assessment of teachers' perceptions toward bullying and cyberbullying and how they relate to students, as well as education about bullying for teachers, is imperative in the reduction of cyberbullying.

Within the microsystem of the school, there is constant interaction between students and teachers. Teachers have the potential to reinforce bullying by failing to promote appropriate interactions among students, or take responsibility in disciplinary action against bullying (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). Within the digital world, teachers are no less instrumental in influencing student behavior; without appropriate responses to cyberbullying, teachers have the potential to reinforce the online behavior of cyberbullying. It is imperative that researchers investigate the positive role of teachers and the importance of teachers' involvement in preventing cyberbullying and negative peer interactions among students in school. An ecological view can be a critical resource for teachers working with students involved in cyberbullying. Studies reported understanding the behaviors and actions of teachers that foster or inhibit

cyberbullying behavior in school is critical, and it is imperative teachers are considered in assessment, prevention, and intervention efforts (Espelage et al., 2014).

**Mesosystem.** The mesosystem consists of a network of relationships between and among the settings in a person's life. A mesosystem represents the interconnections between two or more microsystems in which children actively participate. An example would be the relationship between parents, peers, teachers, or neighborhoods. In terms of the school environment, communications with teachers and peers in school is considered a mesosystem.

**Exosystem.** The exosystem comprises the linkages between two or more settings, one of which does not contain the child. The occurrence of an event within the exosystem can have an indirect influence on the child. An example of an exosystem would be the influence of a parent's workplace on the developing child.

**Macrosystem.** The macrosystem is the most distal and broad level of influence. It comprises influences from a child's larger environment such as cultural values, customs, and laws. Lee (Lee, 2011) suggested that policy, or lack thereof, represents another macrosystem level and is an important consideration for school bullying prevention. With regard to cyberbullying, the lack of legal policy and direction can be considered part of the macrosystem.

**Chronosystem.** The chronosystem includes consistency or change of the child and the environment over the child's life span. This system exerts itself directly upon the child through external or internal events. Cyberbullying is an example of the chronosystem's indirect influence on a child's bullying experience because of the recent increase in social networking sites and text messaging.

## **Bystander Intervention Theory**

The second theoretical framework, the bystander intervention theory proposed by Latane and Darley (1970), guided the research methods of this study. Latane and Darley's classic study was based on a case that involved 38 bystanders who witnessed 45-minutes of torment that ended in the murder of Kitty Genovese. Of the 38 witnesses who viewed the murder from their windows and heard the victim's cries for help, not one bystander intervened or called for assistance. The apparent indifference or apathy the bystanders displayed during the murder of Kitty Genovese led to Latane and Darley's research and development of the bystander intervention theory. Their theory attempted to explain the phenomenon of how bystanders react during an adverse situation or crisis. The theory described a series of stages that determine whether or not an individual who witnesses an emergency will decide to intervene when someone needs help.

Bystanders are onlookers who can stand idly by or look away from an adverse situation; they can aid or abet the perpetrator through acts of omission or commission. "Standing idly by or turning away have costs. Injustice overlooked or ignored becomes a contagion that infects even those who thought they could turn away" (Coloroso, 2003, p. 63). Traditionally, bystander behavior has been explored in the physical world, within the context of interpersonal situations examining when individuals will come to the aid of another. In the online world, where the Internet provides a public domain viewable to all onlookers, witnesses of cyberbullying become bystanders. Because content on the Internet becomes permanent, and cyber acts can be accessed 24-hours a day, seven days a week, it is arguable that someone who becomes knowledgeable of a cyberbullying act can be considered a bystander. A person knowledgeable of such an act,

although not directly involved, has the potential to do nothing, or to act; to step in and diffuse the situation and help make it better, or to make the situation worse by being unsupportive in responding to the victim. This becomes critical in a classroom when a teacher either witnesses or becomes aware of cyberbullying. Teachers can be a potent force in responding to cyberbullying; they can be a resource for intervention and support as digital witnesses.

For the current study, Latane and Darley's (1970) model was used as framework to examine teacher (the bystander) perceptions of cyberbullying (the crisis). The five stages of the bystander intervention theory were examined, situating the teacher as the bystander.

**Stage one.** The theory includes four steps of bystander (teacher) behavior. The first step is for the teacher to notice the event. A teacher must observe that a behavior, such as cyberbullying, is problematic. Personal beliefs that indicate awareness of a problem are key variables in recognizing an event as harmful (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007). The present research study associated teachers' concerns about cyberbullying with Latane and Darley's (1970) variable of awareness.

**Stage two.** In the bystander intervention theory, the second step is identifying the situation as intervention appropriate (Latane & Darley, 1970). The teacher must be able to interpret an incident of cyberbullying as a student risk. Ignorance or ambiguity can create a failure to identify the situation as a risk. A teacher's level of concern and perceived responsibility about responding to cyberbullying could have an impact on the teacher's interpretation of an event as a situation needing intervention.

**Stage three.** The third step is to take responsibility (Latane & Darley, 1970). Bystanders must be able to recognize that another is at risk of harm; they will not intervene if they do not

feel it is their responsibility (Burn, 2009). Applied to this research, a teacher must consider cyberbullying to be harmful to students, and they must feel it is their responsible to intervene. Christy and Voigt (1994) found that participants were more likely to intervene if they felt it was “their business” (p. 841). Bystanders feel responsible for intervening when they have a relationship with the victim. The relationship of teacher to student in this step is parallel to the teacher and student relationship in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) microsystem.

**Stage four.** The fourth step to bystander intervention is to decide how to help and the main barrier is failure to intervene due to skills deficit (Burn, 2009). If a teacher does not have an understanding or the training of how to intervene in cyberbullying, the chances of intervention diminish. Further complicating the chance of intervention is the lack of understanding of policy or legal directives guiding cyberbullying intervention.

**Stage five.** The fifth step, action to intervene (Latane & Darley, 1970) can be impeded by the bystander’s fear of social concerns, leading to a failure to intervene. A teacher’s inhibition may depend on norms and whether the teacher supports intervention. Burn (2009) suggested a bystander may fail to intervene if he or she fears making a mistake or incorrect decision. Because of inconsistent legal guidance, teachers may fear or not perceive a responsibility to intervene in cyberbullying situations.

Bystander intervention and active defense of victims have been associated with decreased bullying (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000; Gidycz, Orchowski, & Berkowitz, 2011). Nickerson, Aloe, Livingston, and Freeley (2014) tested the theoretical model of bystander intervention to measure factors influencing bystanders’ willingness to assist victims of bullying. Applying the bystander intervention theory, Anker and Freeley (2011) argued bystanders (teachers) do not

intervene in an “emergency” (incident of cyberbullying) because they do not interpret the situation as a cause for intervention, they do not accept responsibility to help, or they have minimal knowledge on how to help.

As research continues to investigate the intricacies of online responsibilities of bystanders, “it is paramount to take a retrospective review of the characteristics that traditionally define bystanders and inspect its regenerative process through the digital culture” (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2014). Table 4 presents the teacher as the bystander in relation to cyberbullying and aligns each stage of Latane and Darley’s theory within the digital world, while connecting the stages to an independent variable of this study.

Table 4

*The Teacher as the Bystander in Latané & Darley’s Bystander Intervention Theory*

Stage	Characteristic of bystander intervention	Relation to cyberbullying intervention	Dependent variable
Notice	Notice the event	Observe the behavior of a cyberbullying event as problematic	Teachers’ concerns about cyberbullying
Interpret	Interpret the event as an emergency that requires help	Interpret cyberbullying as a risk to students	Teachers’ concerns about cyberbullying Teachers’ perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying
Responsibility	Accept responsibility for intervening	Recognize a student is at risk and assume responsibility to intervene	Teachers’ perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying
Know	Know how to intervene or provide help	Know school policy and legal protocol guiding cyberbullying intervention	Teachers’ understanding of the law governing cyberbullying Teacher’s perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying
Act	Implement intervention decisions	Act according to school policy and legal protocol guiding cyberbullying intervention	Teachers’ understanding of the law governing cyberbullying Teachers’ perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying



## **Summary of Theoretical Frameworks**

Banyard and colleagues (2007) suggested that Latene and Darley's (1970) bystander intervention model focused on factors within the individual, while Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological model began with the individual and extended into the community. This study expanded the bystander intervention model by applying the model to situations of cyberbullying and as a framework for measuring teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, and their understanding of the law governing cyberbullying. The researcher used Bronfenbrenner's model to examine the microsystem of school community, specifically the variable of school type and its relationship to the research questions of this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this quantitative, survey design study was to examine Catholic school teachers' legal understanding and perceptions of cyberbullying. In examining Catholic school teachers' understanding of the law governing cyberbullying, their concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying, and their perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying, the study examined the human interactions that reflect not only legal responsibilities, but also ethical obligations as caring and just leaders in Catholic schools, with the purpose of filling a gap in the professional literature and providing implications for practice.

This study was designed to help educators recognize the underpinning of their perceptions that influence their decisions when dealing with cyberbullying. According to Mishna et al. (2006), the way in which teachers recognize and respond to bullying and—by extension—cyberbullying, can have an effect on their students. “It would be beneficial to provide information to teachers on the factors that can influence individuals’ decisions about what constitutes [cyber]bullying and to help recognize discrepancies between their espoused views and their reactions to [cyber]bullying incidents” (Mishna et al., 2006, p. 732). Findings of this study will provide data regarding teacher perceptions about cyberbullying and any discrepancies between views and reactions among teachers in Catholic schools. This chapter covers the research questions, research design, procedures, population and sample, instrumentation, data analysis, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

## **Research Questions**

If cyberbullying research is to make a significant contribution to the scholarly literature, there is one basic guideline regarding methods: the research questions drive the choice of methods and not the other way around (Sackett & Wennberg, 1997). The following research questions guided this research study:

- Q1.** What are Catholic school teachers' understandings of the law governing cyberbullying?
- Q2.** What are Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying?
- Q3.** What are Catholic school teachers' perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying?
- Q4.** What are Catholic school teachers' perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying?
- Q5.** Do Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, or their perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying differ by their sex, grade level taught, or self-reported technology skills?
- Q6.** Are there any relationships among Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, and perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying?

## **Research Design**

The methodology for this study was quantitative research. Quantitative research is considered beneficial because it can provide precise numerical data that is independent of the researcher. Findings can be generalized if the sample size is sufficient. Quantitative research

starts with the statement of a problem and recognizes a need for research. The problem should address a gap in professional literature and ultimately improve professional practice (Rovai et al., 2014). As indicated in Chapter 2 of this study, few research studies have addressed teachers' perceptions and legal understanding of cyberbullying, and essentially no literature has addressed the same problem in the population of Catholic school teachers.

Two types of quantitative research design exist in social science: nonexperimental and experimental (Rovai et al., 2014). The researcher used a nonexperimental design for this study. Nonexperimental design involves testing relationships between variables without manipulating the conditions or the participants. Nonexperimental designs include three types of studies: survey designs, correlation designs, and causal-comparative designs. For the purpose of this quantitative study, the researcher used a survey design. A survey design "provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population. From sample results, the researcher generalizes or draws inferences to the population" (Creswell, 2014, p. 155). There are two basic types of survey studies: cross-sectional designs and longitudinal designs. This study used a cross-sectional design; "The defining feature of a cross-sectional study is that it collects data on and compares different population groups at a single point in time" (Rovai et al., 2014, p. 50). An advantage of a survey design is the economy of the design and the immediate data collection.

### **Procedures**

The researcher met with an elementary and a middle school teacher to field test the survey and establish content validity of the questions relating to teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, teachers' perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying, and teachers'

understanding of the law governing cyberbullying. A paper version of the survey was administered to both teachers, and their suggestions were incorporated into the final survey to establish concise and clear statements.

An ethics review was sought from the Loyola Marymount's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to assure compliance with governmental regulations as specified by the Office of Human Research Protections (United States Department of Health and Human Services) and the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (California Health and Human Services Agency). After receiving IRB approval, the researcher administered the survey to teachers within the Diocese of St. Aquinas (a pseudonym). As part of the IRB process, the researcher secured written permission from the associate superintendent of the Diocese of St. Aquinas to survey teachers.

Qualtrics, an online survey software program, was used to electronically send participants the questionnaire to assess their perceptions of cyberbullying and their understanding of the law governing cyberbullying. To facilitate distribution and increase the response rate, the Qualtrics survey link was sent directly to selected Catholic school principals within the Diocese. Principals were asked to forward the survey link to teachers within their individual schools. Rovai and colleagues (2014) suggested increasing survey response rates by having endorsement for the survey by someone who is highly respected in the population being surveyed. The associate superintendent endorsed this study, and written acknowledgement from the associate superintendent was referenced in the email sent to principals.

After the data were electronically collected through Qualtrics, the researcher used Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), a software program used to enter and analyze the

data and to compute descriptive and inferential statistics. Prior to analyzing the data, the researcher cleaned the data by correcting coding errors. Two questions were reverse coded prior to analysis. Question 25, “Cyberbullying is normal adolescent behavior” and question 26, “Cyberbullying prepares students for difficult situations that life inevitably produces” were positively worded questions, requiring reverse coding of the Likert scale responses. The dichotomous true/false questions were coded to indicate correct and incorrect responses prior to evaluation.

### **Population and Participants**

Selecting participants for a survey research study entails choosing participants who already belong to the group the researcher is interested in studying. The researcher was interested in studying teachers in Catholic schools. Teachers within Catholic schools are obligated to provide a supportive community and promote ethical behavior characterized by service and the pursuit of justice (Fourre, 2003). The pursuit of justice within Catholic schools embodies Catholic Social Teachings (CST) and the foundational theme of life and dignity of the human person. The social injustice attached to cyberbullying is a direct assault against human dignity and should be addressed in Catholic schools. Bryk and colleagues (1993) discussed the social engagement within the Catholic school community as encompassing three factors: opportunities for face-to-face interaction and shared experiences among students and teachers; the extended scope of the role of the teachers; and shared beliefs.

For the purpose of this study, Catholic school teachers were selected from the Diocese of St. Aquinas (as pseudonym), located in California. The 2014–2015 census data were obtained from the Diocese of St. Aquinas. Based on the census data, the diocese consisted of 41 schools,

prekindergarten through grade 12, with a total student population of 19,052. The diocese categorized schools as either elementary or secondary school, with middle school contained within in the elementary school classification. In this case, elementary school included grades prekindergarten through grade eight; secondary schools included grade nine through grade 12. The diocese included four religious congregation/private high schools and three diocesan high schools. The elementary schools included 31 diocesan schools and three religious congregation/private schools, including an all-boy boarding school. Religious congregation/private schools operate under different governance models compared to diocesan schools, and are not obligated to diocesan authority or directives.

The diocese included 1,022 elementary and middle school teachers; 84.9% (n = 868) were classified as full-time teachers, and 15.1% (n = 154) were classified as part-time. The teacher population included 11.4% (n = 115) males and 88.7% (n = 907). The race and ethnic membership included seven distinct representations; 0.3% (n = 3) were American Indian/Alaska Native, 4.2% (n = 43) were Asian, 0.4% (n = 4) were Black/African American, 12.2% (n = 125) were Hispanic/Latino, 1.7% (n = 17) were Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 79.5% (n = 812) were White, and 1.8% (n = 18) were multi-racial. No additional demographic information was provided in the census data from the diocese.

Eight schools across different geographic regions within the diocese were purposively selected to participate in the survey. The selected schools were chosen because the researcher believed the sample would be representative of the given population (Gay et al., 2006). As indicated in Table 5, the participants were representative of the population based on sex, race and ethnic membership.

Table 5

*Population and Participant Characteristics*

Variable	Population		Participants	
	N	%	n	%
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	115	11.3	11	11.1
Female	907	88.7	88	88.9
Undisclosed	0		1	
Total	1022	100.0	100	100.0
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
American Indian/Alaskan Native	3	0.3	1	1.0
Asian	43	4.2	6	6.1
Black/African American	4	0.4	1	1.0
Hispanic/Latino	125	12.2	15	15.2
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	17	1.7	0	0.0
White	812	79.5	76	76.8
Multiracial	18	1.8	0	0.0
Undisclosed	0	0.0	1	
Total	1022	100.0	100	100.0

**Participant Characteristics**

Participant characteristics were included on the survey to further describe characteristics of the participants and allow the survey responses to be analyzed by selected characteristic variables. These items included teachers' sex, race/ethnicity, age, length of time as a teacher, length of time at the current school, grade level taught, possession of a valid teacher license, classroom type, highest degree attained, professional development on cyberbullying, course in school law, self-reported knowledge of school law, self-reported technology skills, participation in cyberbullying prevention activities at school, and receipt of a student reporting cyberbullying.

Teachers' age ranged from 23.0 years to 65.0 years, with a mean of 45.0 years, a median of 46.5 years, and a mode of 45.0 years. Length of time teachers taught ranged from one year to



39.0 years, with a mean of 14.6 years, a median of 12.0 years, and a mode of 10.0 years. Length of time teachers taught at their current school was also measured as a continuous variable. The length of time ranged from one year to 30.0 years, with a mean of 7.9 years, a median of 6.0 years, and modes of 1.0 and 3.0 years.

Teachers were asked to indicate if they taught in elementary school (kindergarten to grade five) or middle school (grade six to grade eight). Elementary school was taught by 55.6% ( $n = 55$ ) of the teachers, and middle school was taught by 44.4% ( $n = 44$ ) of the teachers. Table 6 shows the findings.

Teachers were asked if they possessed a valid teacher's license. An overwhelming majority of respondents possessed a valid teacher's license 94.9% ( $n = 93$ ), with 5.1% ( $n = 5$ ) not having a license. The researcher had intended to use this variable to determine if a relationship existed with the research questions; however, the possession of a valid teacher's license has been excluded from analysis due to lack of variation within the sample.

Teachers were asked if they taught in a predominantly general education classroom or a predominantly special education classroom. The majority of participants (96.0%,  $n = 95$ ) taught in a general education classroom, and the minority of teachers (4%,  $n = 4$ ) taught in a special education classroom. As with the question about teachers' possessing a valid teacher's license, the researcher had intended analyze if there were any relationships between the type of classroom the teacher taught in and the four of the research questions; however, because the majority of teachers taught in a general education classroom, there was insufficient variance to analyze and the variable was excluded from further analysis.

Teachers were asked to indicate the highest degree they had attained. The majority of the teachers (93.8%,  $n = 91$ ) had either a bachelor's degree or a master's degree. The remaining respondents had a specialist degree (4.1%,  $n = 4$ ) or a doctorate degree by (2.0%,  $n = 2$ ).

Teachers indicated if they had attended a professional development session on cyberbullying. Slightly more than half of the teachers (55.6%,  $n = 55$ ) had attended a professional development session, while just under half (44.4%,  $n = 44$ ) had not. The participants were asked if they had taken a course in school law. Of those who responded, 26.5% ( $n = 26$ ) had taken a school law class and 73.5% ( $n = 72$ ) had not. Table 6 presents a summary of the participant characteristics.

Table 6

*Participant Characteristics*

Variable	n	Sample
		%
Grade Level Taught		
Kindergarten to Grade 5	55	55.6
Grade 6 to Grade 8	44	44.4
Undisclosed	1	
Total	100	100.0
Valid Teacher's License		
Yes	93	94.9
No	5	5.1
Undisclosed	2	
Total	100	100.0
Classroom Type		
General Education	95	96.0
Special Education	4	4.0
Undisclosed	1	
Total	100	100.0
Highest Degree Attained		
Bachelor's	51	52.0
Master's	41	41.8
Specialist	4	4.1
Doctorate	2	2.0
Undisclosed	2	
Total	100	100.0
Professional Development on Cyberbullying		
Yes	55	55.6
No	44	44.4
Undisclosed	1	
Total	100	100.0
Course in School Law		
Yes	26	26.5
No	72	73.5
Undisclosed	2	
Total	100	100.0

## **Instrumentation**

A review of the literature showed a significant dearth in research on teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying and their understanding of the law governing cyberbullying, and essentially no literature addressed these concerns within the population of Catholic schools. The researcher developed a survey instrument that was informed by the purpose of the study and the research questions, an extensive review of the literature, and experts within the field of cyberbullying. To develop the survey instrument, the researcher reviewed survey instruments created by Li (2007) and Hinduja and Patchin (2009).

Li's survey on *School Cyber Bullying for Pre-Service Teachers* (2007) indicated that few measures had been developed to assess cyberbullying and related issues. In Li's (2007) research, no instrument had been found that dealt with preservice or in-service teacher perceptions about cyberbullying. Li (2007) developed a 26-item questionnaire based on previous research related to school bullying (Siu, 2004) and the researcher's experiences. The survey included two major areas; the first area focused on preservice teachers' demographic data. The section looked at teachers' perceptions about cyberbullying and about their educational experiences in relation to cyberbullying. Responses for each perception item were indicated using a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from strongly disagrees to strongly agree. The researcher obtained written permission from Li to use her survey.

Hinduja and Patchin (2009) created a *Cyberbullying Report Card for Schools* to be used by administrators to address and prepare for cyberbullying concerns. The survey categorizes dichotomous questions based on general assessment, school climate and culture, curriculum and education, cyberbullying responses, policies, technology, and other areas open to responses from

participants. The researcher obtained written permission from Hinduja and Patchin to use their survey instrument. There was neither reliability nor validity information available for this instrument; however, the developers of the tool are prominent practitioners in the field of cyberbullying research and are considered experts in their field of study. Hinduja and Patchin are also the codirectors of the Cyberbullying Research Center and have studied the causes and consequences of cyberbullying.

Like previous work by Li (2009) and Hinduja and Patchin (2009), the confidential survey for this study collected data about teacher characteristics, teacher concerns about cyberbullying, teachers' perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, and teacher understanding of the law governing cyberbullying. The participant characteristics (13 items) generated nominal data. The dependent variables or the construct of teacher concerns about cyberbullying and teacher perceived responsibility about cyberbullying used a 6-point Likert-style interval scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Researchers are inconsistent in designating Likert-style data as interval or ordinal. Typically, education researchers have viewed Likert-style data as interval while health science researchers have viewed the data as ordinal (Rovai et al., 2014). For the purpose of this research, Likert-style responses were considered interval data.

The researcher adapted the Li (2009) and Hinduja and Patchin (2009) surveys and added questions that were relevant to the current research study. The questionnaire included 51 items in four major areas about Catholic school teachers: participant characteristics (16 items); concerns about cyberbullying (nine items); perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying (10 items); and legal understanding of the law governing cyberbullying (16 items). Cronbach's alpha (for scaled data) was examined prior to analyses to determine the internal reliability of the

instrument. The researcher developed the questionnaire to answer the six research questions. The questionnaire and survey items can be found in the Appendix .

**Understanding of the law.** For the first research question, 13 survey items were created that included dichotomous true/false data regarding teachers' understanding of the law governing cyberbullying. Items were presented as a criterion-referenced assessment to test what participants knew about the law-

The data was generated by summing correct responses to items 38 through 51 of the survey instrument. Following the distribution of the survey instrument, additional investigation was conducted by the researcher, and it was determined that question 40 ("If cyberbullying is linked to school disruption, schools can administer disciplinary action") should be excluded from analysis because of inconsistent interpretation of the law addressing this issue, as detailed in Chapter 2 of this study.

**Concerns about cyberbullying.** For the second research question, a composite variable was created for teachers' concerns about cyberbullying using four survey items. The 6-point Likert scale response options ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The Cronbach's alpha was 0.70 suggesting that the items have acceptable internal consistency.

**Perceived responsibility.** For the third research question, a composite variable was created for teachers' perceived responsibility intervening in cyberbullying using seven survey items. The 6-point Likert scale response options ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.70, suggesting that the items have acceptable internal consistency.

**Perceived ability to respond.** For the fourth research question, four survey items were used to create a composite variable. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.81, indicating strong reliability.

These items were asked on a 6-point Likert scale with response options ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

**Participant characteristics.** The fifth research question asked if Catholic school teachers' understanding of the law governing cyberbullying, their concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, and their perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying differed by selected characteristics. Based on a review of the literature, the selected characteristics analyzed were teachers' sex, grade level taught, and self-reported technology skills.

**Relationships among composite variables.** The last research question asked if there were any relationships among Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, and their perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying. The three composite variables used to measure teachers' concerns, teachers' responsibilities, and teachers' perceived abilities were analyzed to determine if any correlations existed among the composite variables.

Teachers' understanding of the law was not examined in relation to the composite variables because understanding of the law was measured with dichotomous data, and a composite variable could not be created. The dichotomous data could not be statistically compared with scaled data; therefore, only scaled data used to measure concerns, perceived responsibility, and perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying were analyzed for research questions six.

**Reliability and validity.** "Validity evaluates how well an instrument measures a construct and refers to the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretations of test

scores” (Rovai et al., 2014, p. 44). There are several types of validity when discussing measurement. Content validity refers to the degree to which a test appropriately represents the content domain it is intended to measure (Sireci, 2007). Two teachers were consulted to validate the constructs of the survey instrument and to contribute to ensuring a strong degree of content validity. Additionally, the items were based on previously published measures (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Li, 2009) that were constructed by experts in the field of cyberbully research.

Because internal validity is difficult to verify, establishing the external validity is of increased importance (Schenker & Rumrill, 2004). External validity is based on the degree to which the sample is representative of the larger population from which the sample is drawn. External validity is best established by randomly selecting participants for the research sample from the larger population and by securing the largest sample possible (Gay et al., 2006).

The survey questionnaire was assessed for reliability by determining either the Cronbach’s alpha or Kuder-Richardson coefficient for each composite, depending on the type of variable. Items that did not hang well together were removed to reduce error.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of survey research begins with examining the descriptive statistics, typically the means of the variables (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The values provide an overview of the data, but do not supply statistical significance of their differences. For this study, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the participant characteristics of the respondents’ answers to the categorical questions. The participant characteristics helped describe the sample and account for similarities and differences among participants.



This survey design was nonexperimental. The statistical tests used to determine the significance of the relationship between the variables in survey research were similar to those used in experimental and quasi-experimental designs. The *t* test for independent samples was used to determine if significant differences existed between the means of independent samples. The observed *t* statistic values and corresponding probability values were interpreted using an alpha set at 0.5 as the level of significance. A quantitative measure of the degree of correspondence was also analyzed by examining the correlation coefficient. “The degree to which two variables are related is expressed as a correlation coefficient, which is a number between +1.00 and -1.00” (Gay et al., 2006, p. 10). A correlation coefficient close to 0.00 indicates little or no relationship, while a coefficient close to +/- 1.00 signifies a high correlation.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

This research study made several assumptions that may have affected the results of the study. All data were collected from the survey questionnaire, which was assumed to be a valid and reliable instrument. The self-reported questionnaire results relied on an assumption that participants responded honestly to the survey questions.

The study also included a number of limitations. The study was limited because it was a nonexperimental design. Cause and effect cannot be determined in a nonexperimental research study; only associations between the independent and dependent variables can be proposed. Because of the sample size, the results of the study cannot be generalized to all Catholic school teachers. However, this limitation was compensated for by attempting to include a sample of teachers who represented their diocese so that results might be generalizable to the entire

diocese. An additional limitation was the reliance on only quantitative data; no focus groups were established, nor were qualitative data collected.

Participants for this study were selected from only one Catholic school diocese within California. Findings are thus delimited to survey results only.

### **Summary**

This nonexperimental, quantitative, survey study examined Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying, and their understanding of the law governing cyberbullying. This chapter included the research questions, research design, procedures, population and sample, instrumentation, data analysis, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this quantitative, survey design study was to examine Catholic school teachers' legal understanding and perceptions of cyberbullying. In examining Catholic school teachers' understanding of the law governing cyberbullying, their concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying, and their perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying, the study examined the human interactions that reflect not only legal responsibilities, but also ethical obligations as caring and just leaders in Catholic schools. The intent was to address a gap in the professional literature and explore implications for practice. The study, which included teachers from the Diocese of St. Aquinas (a pseudonym) in California, was guided by the following six research questions:

- Q1.** What are Catholic school teachers' understandings of the law governing cyberbullying?
- Q2.** What are Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying?
- Q3.** What are Catholic school teachers' perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying?
- Q4.** What are Catholic school teachers' perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying?
- Q5.** Do Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, or their perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying differ by their sex, grade level taught, or self-reported technology skills?

**Q6.** Are there any relationships among Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, and perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying?

### **Response Rate**

The sample size consisted of teachers from eight schools across different geographic regions within the diocese; the schools were representative of the population along sex and race/ethnicity participant characteristics. The eight schools had a total teacher population of 181 teachers. The response rate for the survey was 58.0% ( $n = 105$ ); however, five of the respondents terminated the survey after completing the informed consent. The actual response rate for teachers who completed the survey was 55.2% ( $n = 100$ ). A survey response rate of 50.0% is considered acceptable; "Anything above 50% will increase the confidence with which you speak about your findings as generalizable to the population from which your sample was developed" (Gay et al., 2012, p. 193). A large proportion of research studies, including those on cyberbullying, have utilized convenience samples because of ease of access and efficiency of data collection (Babbie, 2008; Hutch, MacDonald, Hunter, Mactland, & Dixon, 2002). This study used a convenience sample.

### **Understanding of the Law**

Teachers were asked to self-report on a scale of one to 10, where one was considered below basic and 10 was considered advanced how they would describe their knowledge of school law. On average, teachers indicated limited knowledge of school law, with a mean of 4.9, a low of 1.0, a high of 9.0, and no one indicating advanced knowledge of school law. A summary of the results can be found in Table 7.

Table 7

*Self-Reported Knowledge of School Law*

Below Basic									Advanced
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5.1%	6.1%	11.1%	17.2%	20.2%	18.2%	13.1%	8.1%	1.0%	-
(n = 5)	(n = 6)	(n = 11)	(n = 17)	(n = 20)	(n = 18)	(n = 13)	(n = 8)	(n = 1)	-

Two Likert scale items were constructed to solicit teachers’ understanding of students’ constitutional rights to say anything they wanted online, even if it hurt someone or violated someone’s privacy, and if teachers recognized a distinction between students’ rights in Catholic schools and students’ rights in public schools. Results were nearly unanimous; teachers did not agree that students have the right to say anything they want online. The first Likert scale statement stated: “Students in Catholic schools have the right to say anything they want online, even if it hurts someone or violates someone’s privacy.” The vast majority of teachers (99%;  $n = 95$ ) disagreed to some degree, while 1.0% ( $n = 1$ ) strongly agreed with the statement. The second item was similar, substituting public schools for Catholic schools in the statement, “Students in public schools have the right to say anything they want online, even if it hurts someone or violates someone’s privacy.” Individuals responded similarly to the statement about Catholic schools with 97.9% ( $n = 94$ ) disagreeing and 2.0% ( $n = 2$ ) somewhat agreeing or strongly agreeing. Table 8 shows the individual Likert responses to the statements regarding students’ rights to say anything online.

Table 8

*Students' Rights to Say Anything Online*

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Missing
Students in Catholic schools	80.4% (n = 78)	17.0% (n = 17)	1.0% (n = 1)	-	-	1.0% (n = 1)	3
Students in public schools	77.1% (n = 74)	19.8% (n = 19)	1.0% (n = 1)	1.0% (n = 1)	-	1.0% (n = 1)	3

In addition to the two Likert scale items, 14 true/false items were constructed to measure teachers' understanding of the law governing cyberbullying. After analyses, survey item number 51, "Students are entitled to Constitutional rights when attending Catholic schools that receive government subsidies," was determined to be ambiguous and was not included in any further analysis. The remaining 13 true/false items were used to evaluate teachers' legal understating of cyberbullying.

Only 38.5% of teachers in the sample (n = 37) correctly answered that the federal law does not mandate schools to respond to incidences of cyberbullying. The findings indicated that over 60% of participants thought the federal government provided laws for cyberbullying, when in fact no laws existed as of February 2015.

The majority of participants (85.3%, n = 81) correctly indicated that California has bullying and cyberbullying laws, and 75.8% (n = 72) recognized the California Education Code permits schools to discipline students involved in cyberbullying whether it originates on or off campus. A significant percentage 91.6% (n = 87) understood that California has legislation that defines bullying to include electronic acts that can be grounds for suspension or expulsion.

Teachers correctly recognized (93.7%,  $n = 89$ ) that if cyberbullying is linked to a school disruption, schools can administer disciplinary action. In recognizing that schools can be held liable for negligence in a civil suit for improperly responding to cyberbullying incidents, 90.5% ( $n = 86$ ) correctly indicated public schools can be held liable, and 86.3% ( $n = 82$ ) correctly believed Catholic schools can also be held liable.

Three-quarters of the teachers accurately understood Catholic schools have jurisdiction over what happens outside of school and can discipline students for cyberbullying (76.6%,  $n = 72$ ), with a slightly lower percentage (65.3%,  $n = 62$ ) of teachers accurately understanding public schools, under certain circumstances, have a similar jurisdiction and can also discipline students for cyberbullying.

Two survey items were constructed to determine teachers' understanding of students' constitutional rights to freedom of speech: "Students in Catholic schools shed their Constitutional rights to freedom of speech at the school house gate" and "Students in public schools shed their Constitutional rights to freedom of speech at the school house gate." Slightly more than a third of Catholic school teachers (37.5%,  $n = 36$ ) recognized that students' constitutional rights are not typically recognized in Catholic schools. A significantly larger percentage of teachers (88.5%,  $n = 85$ ) were able to correctly identify that students in public schools do have Constitutional rights to freedom of speech. Although the language used for these two survey items mirrored the Court's ruling in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969), the researcher postulates the low percentage of correct responses regarding students in Catholic schools may be associated with the perceived pejorative language in the survey item.

Most teachers in the sample (85.1%,  $n = 80$ ) accurately understood public schools are government agents, and a smaller percentage (69.1%,  $n = 65$ ) understood Catholic schools are not government agents. Actual percentages of correct and incorrect answers to survey items addressing teachers' understanding of the law governing cyberbullying can be found in Table 9.



Table 9

*Understanding of the Law*

Survey Item	% Correct (n)	% Incorrect (n)	% Missing (n)
Federal law mandates that schools respond to incidences of cyberbullying.	38.5 (37)	61.5 (59)	4.0 (4)
California has no bullying or cyberbullying laws.	85.3 (81)	14.7 (14)	5.0 (5)
If cyberbullying is linked to school disruption, schools can administer disciplinary action.	93.7 (89)	6.3 (6)	5.0 (5)
California Education Code permits schools to discipline students involved in cyberbullying that originates on or off campus.	75.8 (72)	24.2 (23)	5.0 (5)
California legislation has defined bullying to include electronic acts that can be grounds for suspension or expulsion.	91.6 (87)	8.4 (8)	5.0 (5)
Public school districts can be held liable for negligence in a civil suit for improperly responding to cyberbullying incidents.	90.5 (86)	9.5 (9)	5.0 (5)
Catholic school dioceses can be held liable for negligence in a civil suit for improperly responding to cyberbullying incidents.	86.3 (82)	13.7 (13)	5.0 (5)
Catholic schools have no jurisdiction over what happens outside of school and cannot discipline students for cyberbullying.	76.6 (72)	23.4 (22)	6.0 (6)
Public schools have no jurisdiction over what happens outside of school and cannot discipline students for cyberbullying.	65.3 (62)	34.7 (33)	5.0 (5)
Students in Catholic schools shed their Constitutional rights to freedom of speech at the school house gate.	37.5 (36)	62.5 (60)	4.0 (4)
Students in public schools shed their Constitutional rights to freedom of speech at the school house gate.	88.5 (85)	11.5 (11)	4.0 (4)
Public schools are government agents and subject to Constitutional restrictions.	85.1 (80)	14.9 (14)	6.0 (6)
Catholic schools are government agents and subject to Constitutional restrictions.	69.1 (65)	30.9 (29)	6.0 (6)

After measuring the percentages of correct and incorrect responses for each of the true/false survey items for understanding law, frequencies were calculated to determine the total number of correct answers per survey item. The minimum number of correct responses to the true/false statements per respondent was 3.0, and the maximum number of correct items was 11.0 ( $M = 6.16$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ,  $N = 91$ ). Table 10 shows the total number of correct true/false items.

Table 10

*Correct Understanding of the Law True/False Items*

No. Items Correct	Percentage
1	-
2	-
3	4.4% ( $n = 4$ )
4	13.2% ( $n = 12$ )
5	22.0% ( $n = 20$ )
6	25.3% ( $n = 23$ )
7	8.8% ( $n = 8$ )
8	14.3% ( $n = 13$ )
9	8.8% ( $n = 8$ )
10	2.2% ( $n = 2$ )
11	1.1% ( $n = 1$ )
12	-
13	-
Total	100% ( $n = 91$ )
Missing	9

The survey instrument provided an open-ended response option. Four participants (4.0%) provided comments; all were related to their understanding of the law governing cyberbullying. One participant noted, “I really wasn’t sure about the laws. My answers were guesses.” Another respondent commented, “I would like to know the answers to the above T/F questions. I hope they are shown on the next screen!” A participant stated, “I do not know the laws on the above true/false questions. I took my best guess.” Lastly, a respondent noted, “I guessed on some of the law questions, and then just skipped the rest.”

## Concerns About Cyberbullying

The composite variable for Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying included 6-point Likert scale items, where one was equivalent to *strongly disagree* and six was equivalent to *strongly agree*. The composite for concern indicated a high level of concern about cyberbullying among teachers ( $M = 5.28$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ,  $N = 97$ ).

When teachers were asked if they were concerned about cyberbullying, a significant majority (96.9%,  $n = 94$ ) of the sample indicated they were somewhat to strongly concerned about cyberbullying. Nearly the entire population (99.0%,  $n = 96$ ) indicated a belief that cyberbullying violated the dignity of the human person, including 76.3% ( $n = 74$ ) who strongly agreed with the statement. Teachers were concerned about cyberbullying and indicated they somewhat agreed to strongly agreed that cyberbullying was as important as other topics they wanted covered in professional development. The vast majority of the sample (97.9%,  $n = 94$ ) indicated that it made them angry when students were cyberbullied, and 61.5% ( $n = 59$ ) strongly agreed with the statement.

Teachers were asked if cyberbullying was a problem in schools across the country, and if cyberbullying was a problem at their current school. A notable difference was shown between teachers' responses about the problem of cyberbullying in schools across the country and about the problem in their current school. The entire sample (100%,  $n = 99$ ) somewhat agreed to strongly agreed that cyberbullying was a problem across the country. However, less than half (48.9%,  $n = 45$ ) of the same group indicated cyberbullying was a problem at their current school.

When teachers were asked if cyberbullying was normal adolescent behavior 90.5% ( $n = 86$ ) disagreed to some degree. The remaining 9.5% ( $n = 9$ ) somewhat agreed cyberbullying was

normal adolescent behavior. Teachers were then given the statement, “Cyberbullying prepares students for difficult situations life inevitably produces.” A large percentage of teachers disagreed to some degree (89.4%,  $n = 85$ ) with the statement; 10.5% ( $n = 10$ ) somewhat agreed. The majority of teachers indicated cyberbullying is not considered normal behavior, and cyberbullying does not prepare students for difficult situations. Yet, 10.5% ( $n = 10$ ) of the teachers somewhat agreed cyberbullying prepares students for difficult situations, and 9.5% ( $n = 9$ ) somewhat agreed cyberbullying is normal adolescent behavior. Table 11 shows the results of the survey items used to answer Research Question Two.

Table 11

*Teachers' Concerns About Cyberbullying*

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Missing
I am concerned about cyberbullying.	1.0% (1)	1.0% (1)	1.0% (1)	17.5% (17)	40.2% (39)	39.2% (38)	3% (3)
Cyberbullying violates the dignity of the human person.	-	-	-	1.0% (1)	22.7% (22)	76.3% (74)	3% (3)
Cyberbullying is just as important as other topics I want covered in professional development.	1.0% (1)	2.1% (2)	5.2% (5)	24.7% (24)	41.2% (40)	25.8% (25)	3% (3)
It makes me angry when students are cyberbullied.	2.1% (2)	-	2.0% (2)	5.2% (5.0)	29.2% (28)	61.5% (59)	4% (4)
Cyberbullying is a problem in schools across the country.	-	-	-	17.0% (16)	36.2% (34)	46.8% (44)	6
Cyberbullying is a problem at my current school.	4.4% (4)	15.2% (14)	31.5% (29)	22.8% (21)	23.9% (22)	2.2% (2)	8
Cyberbullying is normal adolescent behavior.	30.5% (29)	44.2% (42)	15.8% (15)	9.5% (9)	-	-	5
Cyberbullying prepares students for difficult situations that life inevitably produces.	36.8% (35)	40.0% (38)	12.6% (12)	10.5% (10)	-	-	5

**Perceived Responsibility to Address Cyberbullying**

The composite variable for Catholic school teachers' perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying included 6-point Likert scale items, where one was equivalent to *strongly disagree* and six was equivalent to *strongly agree*. The composite variable for teachers' perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying indicated that teachers' agreed they have a responsibility in addressing cyberbullying ( $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ,  $N = 97$ ).

When teachers were asked if they felt it was important to help victims of cyberbullying, an overwhelming majority (96.9%,  $n = 94$ ) of the teachers agreed to some degree that it was important to help victims. Teachers were asked if it was part of their responsibility to respond if cyberbullying originated on campus. Again a large majority of teachers (98.0%,  $n = 94$ ) agreed to some degree, including 70.8% ( $n = 68$ ) who strongly agreed. Teachers also indicated they agreed to some degree (92.8%,  $n = 90$ ) that it was also part of their responsibility to respond if cyberbullying originated off campus, including 25.8% ( $n = 25$ ) who strongly agreed.

Data indicated teachers perceived to have a responsibility to intervene in cyberbullying incidents, independent of where the cyberbullying originated. However, a much smaller percentage of teachers were in agreement about promoting moral behavior when students use the Internet. When teachers were asked if promoting moral behaviors when children use the Internet was the parent's obligation, not the teachers', 32.9% ( $n = 31$ ) of the participants somewhat agreed, or strongly agreed with the statement and 68.1% ( $n = 66$ ) disagreed to some degree. Four of the survey questions measured perceived responsibility in relation to school resources or influences. Regarding the perception that there is not much schools can do to protect students from cyberbullying by other students, 84.4% ( $n = 81$ ) somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. This question was reverse coded for the composite variable. The majority of teachers (97.9%,  $n = 97$ ) agreed to some degree that schools should discipline students involved in cyberbullying. Teachers also agreed (89.7%,  $n = 89$ ) that school resources should be used to help teachers deal with cyberbullying. Table 12 shows the results of the survey items used to answer Research Question Three.

Table 12

*Perceived Responsibility Composite*

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Missing
I feel it is important for teachers to help victims of cyberbullying.	2.1% (2)	-	1.0% (1)	4.1% (4)	38.1% (37)	54.6% (53)	3% (3)
It is part of my responsibility as a teacher to respond if cyberbullying originates <i>on</i> campus.	1.0% (1)	-	1.0% (1)	1.0% (1)	26.0% (25)	70.8% (68)	4% (4)
It is part of my responsibility as a teacher to respond if cyberbullying originates <i>off</i> campus.	1.0% (1)	2.1% (2)	4.1% (4)	30.9% (30)	36.1% (35)	25.8% (25)	3% (3)
Promoting moral behaviors when children use the Internet is the parents' obligation, not the teachers.	16.5% (16)	39.2% (38)	12.4% (12)	22.7% (22)	8.2% (8)	1.0% (1)	3% (3)
There is not much a school can do to protect students from cyberbullying by other students.	28.1% (27)	41.7% (40)	14.6% (14)	14.6% (14)	1.0% (1)	-	4% (4)
School resources should be used to help teachers deal with cyberbullying.	-	2.1% (2)	5.2% (5)	22.9% (22)	45.8% (44)	24.0% (23)	4% (4)
Schools should discipline students involved in cyberbullying.	-	-	2.1% (2)	13.5% (13)	27.1% (26)	57.3% (55)	4% (4)

## Perceived Ability to Respond

The composite variable for Catholic school teachers' perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying included 6-point Likert scale items, where one was equivalent to *strongly disagree* and six was equivalent to *strongly agree*. The composite variable indicated teachers' were somewhat neutral in their perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ,  $N = 97$ ).

Teachers were closely divided, with 43.9% ( $n = 44$ ) of the teachers disagreeing and 56.3% ( $n = 57$ ) agreeing. Teachers agreed to some degree (64.9%,  $n = 59$ ) that they were able to effectively respond to cyberbullying, and 35.2% ( $n = 32$ ) disagreed. Two of the survey items addressed teachers' ability to respond to cyberbullying in relation to school support. The majority of teachers (71.7%,  $n = 72$ ) indicated that consequences for cyberbullying were consistently enforced at their current school, and just over a quarter (28.2%,  $n = 26$ ) disagreed. One fourth of the teachers (24.5%,  $n = 23$ ) disagreed to some degree that their current school had a clear cyberbullying policy, and three quarters (75.5%,  $n = 71$ ) agreed. Table 13 shows the survey items used to construct a composite variable to examine teachers' ability to effectively respond to cyberbullying.



Table 13

*Responding Composite*

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Missing
Teachers know how to recognize to cyberbullying issues and how to intervene in an appropriate manner.	3.1% (3)	17.7% (17)	22.9% (22)	44.8% (43)	9.4% (9)	2.1% (2)	4% (4)
Consequences for cyberbullying are consistently enforced at my current school.	4.3% (4)	7.6% (7)	16.3% (15)	29.3% (27)	35.9% (33)	6.5% (6)	8% (8)
I am able to effectively respond to incidences of cyberbullying.	2.2% (2)	13.2% (12)	19.8% (18)	31.9% (29)	28.6% (26)	4.4% (4)	9% (9)
My current school has a clear cyberbullying policy.	4.3% (4)	8.5% (8)	11.7% (11)	35.1% (33)	31.9% (30)	8.5% (8)	6% (6)

**Participant Characteristics**

**Sex.** Male and female participants had similar perceptions about cyberbullying. As shown in Table 14, the statistical mean for teachers’ concerns, perceived responsibility, and perceived ability to respond, were distributed quite evenly across all variables.

**Grade level taught.** As seen in Table 14, the findings of this study show grade level taught was not a factor in teacher’s concerns, perceived responsibility, or perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying. The mean was distributed evenly across grade level taught for the three research questions.

**Self-reported technology skills.** For the current study, teachers were asked to self-report on a scale of one to 10, where one was considered below basic and 10 was considered advanced, how they would describe their technology skills. On average, teachers indicated their technology skills were 6.9, with a low of 1.0 and a high of 10.0. A summary of the results can be found in Table 6.

A Pearson-moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between the composite variables for Catholic school teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, and teachers' perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying. The data showed a positive correlation between teachers' self-reported technology skills and teachers' perceived responsibility in handling cyberbullying ( $r = 0.22$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), such that teachers who self-perceived having more advanced technology skills also perceived a greater responsibility in addressing cyberbullying. The mean and standard deviation can be found in Table 14.

Based on the literature, teacher's sex, grade level taught, and self-reported technology skills were examined in relation to the composite variables. The mean for teachers' concerns about cyberbullying and teachers' perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying were distributed evenly across all participant characteristic variables. The mean for teacher's perceived responsibility was distributed evenly, with the exception of teacher's self-reported technology skills. Teachers who perceived they had more advanced technology skills also perceived to have more responsibility to address cyberbullying. The data are presented on Table 14.

Table 14

*Selected Characteristics and Concern, Perceived Responsibility, and Perceived Ability*

Characteristic	Concern		Perceived Responsibility		Perceived Ability to Respond	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Sex						
Male	5.35 ( <i>n</i> = 11)	0.54	4.98 ( <i>n</i> = 11)	0.31	4.14 ( <i>n</i> = 11)	0.63
Female	5.27 ( <i>n</i> = 86)	0.59	5.08 ( <i>n</i> = 86)	0.58	3.81 ( <i>n</i> = 86)	0.96
Grade level taught						
K – 5	5.31 ( <i>n</i> = 53)	0.61	5.12 ( <i>n</i> = 53)	0.55	3.83 ( <i>n</i> = 53)	1.01
6 – 8	5.25 ( <i>n</i> = 44)	0.55	4.99 ( <i>n</i> = 44)	0.56	3.86 ( <i>n</i> = 44)	0.82
Technology Skills						
1	5.00 ( <i>n</i> = 1)	-	4.29 ( <i>n</i> = 1)	-	3.50 ( <i>n</i> = 1)	-
2	5.40 ( <i>n</i> = 1)	-	5.29 ( <i>n</i> = 1)	-	3.75 ( <i>n</i> = 1)	-
3	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	5.00 ( <i>n</i> = 2)	0.28	4.29 ( <i>n</i> = 2)	0.61	3.00 ( <i>n</i> = 2)	1.41
5	5.36 ( <i>n</i> = 16)	0.53	4.90 ( <i>n</i> = 16)	0.59	3.89 ( <i>n</i> = 16)	0.95
6	5.02 ( <i>n</i> = 10)	0.91	4.85 ( <i>n</i> = 10)	0.60	3.35 ( <i>n</i> = 10)	1.01
7	5.35 ( <i>n</i> = 31)	0.57	5.13 ( <i>n</i> = 31)	0.48	3.94 ( <i>n</i> = 31)	0.84
8	5.26 ( <i>n</i> = 20)	0.51	5.11 ( <i>n</i> = 20)	0.64	3.71 ( <i>n</i> = 20)	1.03
9	5.31 ( <i>n</i> = 11)	0.66	5.25 ( <i>n</i> = 11)	0.44	4.21 ( <i>n</i> = 11)	0.82
10	5.25 ( <i>n</i> = 4)	0.44	5.39 ( <i>n</i> = 4)	0.14	4.50 ( <i>n</i> = 4)	0.65

**Relationships among Composite Variables**

The three composite variables—teachers’ concern about cyberbullying, teachers’ perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying, and teachers’ perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying—were analyzed to determine if any significant relationships existed among the composite variables. Teachers’ understanding of the law governing cyberbullying was measured as a criterion referenced test and not as a scaled variable. As such, teachers’ understanding of the law did not lend itself to statistical analysis in relation to the composites of concern, perceived responsibility, and perceived ability.

Two significant relationships were found. The first relationship was between teachers’ concerns about cyberbullying and teachers’ perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying. The second relationship was found between teachers’ perceived responsibility in addressing

cyberbullying and teachers' perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying. Table 15 reflects the relationships.

Table 15

*Correlations of Composites*

		Concern	Responsibility	Respond
Concern	Pearson Correlation	1	.670**	.004
Responsibility	Pearson Correlation	.670**	1	.207*
Respond	Pearson Correlation	.004	.207*	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A statistically significant relationship was found between teachers' concerns about cyberbullying and teachers perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying ( $r = 0.67, p < 0.01$ ), such that teachers who were more concerned about cyberbullying perceived a greater responsibility in addressing cyberbullying. A statistically significant relationship was found between teachers who perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying and teachers' perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying ( $r = 0.21, p < 0.05$ ), in that the more teachers perceived a responsibility in addressing cyberbullying, the more they perceived they were able to effectively respond to cyberbullying.

**Summary of Findings**

Teachers self-reported a below-basic to slightly below average knowledge of school law. Teachers demonstrated a mixed understanding of school law related to cyberbullying on a criterion-referenced test. Nearly all teachers understood that cyberbullying linked to school

disruption can incur disciplinary action. A large majority of respondents understood that public schools can be held liable for negligence in a civil suit for improperly responding to cyberbullying incidents, but only a third of the same respondents understood that federal law mandates that schools respond to incidences of cyberbullying. Less than three-quarters of the teachers recognized that Catholic schools are not government agents and not subject to Constitutional restrictions, and slightly more than a third of the Catholic school teachers understood that Constitutional rights to freedom of speech are not recognized in Catholic schools. Respondents further expressed ambiguity about the law in open-ended questions.

Teachers indicated a high level of concern about cyberbullying. More than three-quarters of the teachers strongly agreed that cyberbullying violates the dignity of the human person. Just under half of the teachers strongly agreed that cyberbullying is a problem across the country.

Catholic school teachers perceived themselves to be responsible in addressing cyberbullying. More than half of the respondents strongly agreed that it is important to help victims of cyberbullying and that schools should discipline students involved in cyberbullying.

Teachers were somewhat neutral in their perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying. Slightly more than half of the respondents agreed that they knew how to recognize cyberbullying issues and how to intervene in an appropriate manner.

No statistical relationships were found between teacher's sex and grade level taught to teachers' concerns about cyberbullying, teachers' perceived responsibility, and teachers' perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying. Teachers who perceived that they had more advanced technology skills perceived themselves to have more responsibility in addressing

cyberbullying. No relationship was found between perceived technology skills, teachers' concerns, or teachers' perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying.

Statistical significance was found across two of the three composite variables in this study. A positive correlation was found between teachers' concerns about cyberbullying and teachers' perceived responsibility in responding to cyberbullying, such that teachers who were more concerned about cyberbullying perceived a greater responsibility in addressing cyberbullying. A positive relationship was also found between teachers who perceived a responsibility in addressing cyberbullying and teachers' perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying in that the more teachers perceived a responsibility, the more they perceived that they were able to effectively respond. The data indicated no statistically significant relationship between the composite variable for teachers' concerns about cyberbullying and teachers' perceived ability to effectively respond to cyberbullying.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the research conducted. It discusses the findings, provides implications for practice, and makes recommendations for future research.

#### **Summary of the Study**

The bully has been a figure in adolescent life for decades; however, the nature of bullying in the 21st century has changed as it has moved from the playground to cyberspace. The advent of cyberbullying brings concern because it persists beyond the school setting and can occur at any time (Tokunga, 2010). While most cyberbullying does not originate in school, the consequences of these behaviors significantly affect what is going on at school. As students embrace the Internet, educators must recognize and respond to signs of cyberbullying before children's well-being and learning are adversely affected (Epstein & Kazmierczak, 2006). For the critical role teachers can play in preventing cyberbullying among students, administrators should understand how teachers perceive this type of relatively new aggressive behavior (Huang & Chou, 2013; Stauffer et al., 2012) and identify teachers' ability to respond to cyberbullying with appropriate interventions.

As legal action concerning cyberbullying is beginning to surface, teachers need to be knowledgeable about the laws governing teacher interactions with students; teachers are expected to exercise steps to prevent harm so students can be educated in an environment free from fear. Teachers who are able to effectively recognize cyberbullying as a problem in their

school environment have the ability to empower the entire school community to effectively deal with cyberbullying (Paul et al., 2012).

Using both the social ecological theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and the bystander intervention theory established by Latane and Darley (1970) as lenses for exploration, this quantitative, survey design study examined Catholic school teachers' legal understanding and perceptions of cyberbullying. By investigating Catholic school teachers' understanding of the law and their awareness of cyberbullying, the study examined the human interactions that reflect not only legal responsibilities, but also ethical obligations as caring and just leaders in Catholic schools, with the purpose of filling a gap in the professional literature and providing implications for practice. Catholic schools must "Boldly become citizens of the digital world" (Francis, 2014, p. 8) while also being concerned with humanity and the dignity of every person. To understand, to be concerned, to accept responsibility and to effectively respond to the needs of students exemplifies what it is to be caring and just leaders in Catholic schools.

The researcher developed a survey instrument of 51 questions informed by the purpose of the study and the research questions. The survey instrument was distributed online through Qualtrics to eight Catholic schools within the Diocese of St. Aquinas (a pseudonym) located in California. One hundred elementary and middle school teachers completed the survey for a response rate of 55.2% ( $n = 100$ ).

### **Application of Theoretical Framework**

The researcher used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model to examine the microsystem of school community, specifically Catholic schools and its relationship to the research questions. The study also expanded Latane and Darley's (1970) bystander intervention theory by applying



the model to situations of cyberbullying and as a framework for measuring Catholic school teacher’s understanding of the law governing cyberbullying, their concerns, their perceived responsibility to address cyberbullying, and their perceived ability to respond.

Table 16 aligns the findings of this study within the theoretical framework of Latane and Darley’s (1970) bystander theory. The study situated the teacher as the bystander in relation to cyberbullying and aligned each stage of Latane and Darley’s (1970) theory within the digital world, while connecting the stages to the research questions and the findings.

Table 16

*Findings Situated Within Latané & Darley’s Bystander Intervention Theory*

Stage	Relation to Cyberbullying	Research Question	Findings
Notice	Observe the behavior of a cyberbullying event as problematic	Concern	Teachers were concerned about cyberbullying
Interpret	Interpret cyberbullying as a risk to students	Concern Responsibility	Teachers were concerned about cyberbullying Teachers perceived a high level of responsibility
Responsibility	Recognize a student is at risk and assume responsibility to intervene	Responsibility	Teachers perceived a high level of responsibility
Know	Know school policy and legal protocol guiding cyberbullying intervention	Perceived Ability to Respond	Teachers had limited understanding of the law governing cyberbullying.
		Understanding Law	Teachers perceived a low level of ability to respond
Act	Act according to school policy and legal protocol guiding cyberbullying intervention	Perceived Ability to Respond	Teachers had limited understanding of the law governing cyberbullying.
		Understanding Law	Teachers perceived a low level of ability to respond

Applying the bystander intervention theory to the findings of this study makes it apparent that teachers must “act” or intervene in incidences of and have a clear understanding of the laws governing cyberbullying and the perceived ability to respond. Findings indicated that teachers have limited knowledge of the law and low perceived ability to respond, which inhibits their capacity to intervene.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

The study was driven by the following six research questions:

- Q1.** What are Catholic school teachers’ understandings of the law governing cyberbullying?
- Q2.** What are Catholic school teachers’ concerns about cyberbullying?
- Q3.** What are Catholic school teachers’ perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying?
- Q4.** What are Catholic school teachers’ perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying?
- Q5.** Do Catholic school teachers’ concerns about cyberbullying, their perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, or their perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying differ by their sex, grade level taught, or self-reported technology skills?
- Q6.** Are there any relationships among Catholic school teachers’ concerns about cyberbullying, perceived responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying, and perceived abilities to respond to cyberbullying?

## **Understanding of the Law**

The study showed that Catholic school teachers self-reported a lower than average understanding of school law, with less than a quarter of the participants indicating an understanding of the law. The data further showed that teachers had mixed understandings of the law governing cyberbullying. On average, teachers accurately answered less than half of the survey items that measured knowledge of the law governing cyberbullying.

Just over a third of the teachers understood that Constitutional rights are not typically recognized in Catholic schools, and less than 70.0% of Catholic school teachers surveyed recognized that Catholic schools are not government agents. The researcher anticipated a higher percentage of correct responses to these two survey items that addressed Catholic schools because all teachers in the survey were educators in Catholic schools.

The data support a need for more training to inform Catholic schools teachers of the laws governing cyberbullying. Although private institutions including Catholic schools typically do not have to recognize students' constitutional rights unless substantial state action is present, private schools cannot be arbitrary in their decision making.

Along with allegations of negligence, students have brought cases to the courts alleging violations of constitutional rights and freedom of expression. The Supreme Court has not heard any cases involving schools—neither public nor private—that concern cyberbullying which has left school administrators having to consult with lower courts for legal direction. As litigation continues to increase, teachers and administrators in both private as well as Catholic schools must be familiar with legal precedents found in state and lower court decisions as the rulings guide legal decision making.

## **Concerns About Cyberbullying**

The research showed that Catholic school teachers were concerned about cyberbullying. The findings are consistent with the national and international literature indicating that teachers are concerned about cyberbullying (Cassidy et al., 2012; Compton et al., 2014; Eden et al., 2013; Huang & Chou, 2013; Li., 2008; Mannix-McNamara & Moynihan, 2010; Ryan et al., 2011).

The entire sample of this study agreed to some degree that cyberbullying was a problem across the country; however, less than half of the same group of teachers indicated cyberbullying was a problem at their current school. Li (2008) similarly found although preservice teachers were concerned and aware of the significant effects of cyberbullying, they did not think it was problem in their schools. The discrepancy between the perceptions of cyberbullying across the country in comparison to cyberbullying at teachers' current schools was similar to findings in other studies that asked participants to compare their site to a larger population. For example, the 2014 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallop Poll (PDK/Gallop Poll) asked a sample to assign a grade to American schools. Of those surveyed, 17.0% assigned schools an A or a B rating. When the same questions were asked of their local public school community, 54.0% gave their local schools an A or a B. Participants in the PDK/Gallop Poll along with this this study and Li's (2008) research, indicated that their current school sites were performing twice as well as the larger population. Further research should be conducted to identify the factors responsible for the perception of lower incidents of cyberbullying at teachers' school sites, but higher incidents nationwide.

The majority of teachers indicated cyberbullying was not considered normal behavior, and cyberbullying did not prepare students for difficult situations. However, just over 10% of the

teachers indicated cyberbullying prepared students for difficult situations in life, and just fewer than 10% of the teachers considered cyberbullying to be normal adolescent behavior. Although results from these two survey items were statistically lower than similar data found in Stauffer and colleagues' (2012) study that indicated one quarter of their participants agreed cyberbullying "prepares students for life," the researcher did not expect to find similar results in this study looking at Catholic school teachers. The fact that 10% of Catholic school teachers considered cyberbullying normal behavior and believed cyberbullying prepared students for life is in direct conflict to Catholic personalism, which is the communal norm for Catholic schools (Bryk et al., 1993). Catholic personalism is characterized by the social relations and solidarity that support interactions and relationships within a just and caring community. Accepting cyberbullying as normal behavior that prepares students for life negates the social justice mission of Catholic schools.

### **Perceived Responsibility to Address Cyberbullying**

The study showed that Catholic school teachers perceived a high level of responsibility in addressing cyberbullying and did not discriminate if cyberbullying originated on or off campus. This is in contrast with Stauffer and colleagues' (2012) study, in which participants were undecided about responding to cyberbullying if it occurred away from school. Teachers saw themselves as having little or no responsibility to intervene if cyberbullying originated off campus (Stauffer et al., 2012).

Although Catholic school teachers perceived a responsibility in addressing cyberbullying, one survey item was inconsistent with the findings. More than a third of the teachers surveyed agreed with the statement, "Promoting moral behaviors when children use the Internet is the

parent's obligation, not the teachers',” suggesting that 30.0% of the Catholic school teachers do not believe that promoting moral behavior is the teacher's obligation. The researcher was expecting data to indicate a higher level of disagreement with the statement because promoting moral behavior and the “formation of ethical and social awareness” (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012, p. 12) are defining characteristics of Catholic schools. Fundamentally, Catholic schools are committed to the development of the whole child, and it is the school's “duty to cultivate human values” (John Paul II, 1979), inherently including the promotion of moral behavior. Part of Catholic school tradition and culture is the partnership with parents in which the Catholic school community unites to educate their children: “Parents share their educational responsibilities with other individuals and institutions, primarily the school” (Miller, 2006, p. 9). Nearly a third of the teachers did not recognize this relationship with parents.

### **Perceived Ability to Respond to Cyberbullying**

An examination of the research on teachers' perceived ability to respond to cyberbullying showed that Catholic school teachers perceived a low level of ability to respond to cyberbullying. Just under half of the teachers indicated they did not know how to recognize cyberbullying and how to intervene in an appropriate manner.

The published literature is nearly unanimous with the findings of this study. Stauffer and colleagues (2012) indicated that although teachers were inclined to respond to cyberbullying, they were unsure how they should respond. Huang and Chou (2013) found that teachers were not confident in addressing cyberbullying incidences, and the authors suggested that training be included in teacher education. Li's (2008) study revealed just over 10% of their teachers expressed confidence in managing cyberbullying. Eden, Heiman, and Olenik-Shemesh (2013)

also suggested teachers were concerned about the issue of cyberbullying but their confidence in managing cyberbullying problems was low. Eden and colleagues (2013), in conjunction with Li (2008), identified the need for teacher education to include information about cyberbullying. Yilmaz (2010) found similar results, which showed that teachers were aware of cyberbullying but were not confident in dealing with it. McNamara and McNamara (2010) found that less than 10% of their surveyed teachers felt capable of resolving incidences of cyberbullying to the satisfaction of all involved. The literature as well as the findings of this study suggest that training is needed to empower teachers with tools to effectively respond to cyberbullying.

### **Participant Characteristics**

This study found no significant differences between males and females in their concerns about cyberbullying. This finding was consistent with Huang and Chou's (2013) study that showed male and female teachers were equally concerned about cyberbullying. However, this study's finding, along with Huang and Chou's (2013), was inconsistent with Eden, Heiman, and Olenik-Shemesh (2013), who found that female teachers were more concerned than male teachers.

This study also found that there was no significant difference between grade levels taught and Catholic school teacher's perceptions of cyberbullying. This finding did not support Huang and Chou (2013) or Eden et al. (2013), whose data suggested significant differences between teachers who teach in elementary school and teachers who teach in middle school regarding their concerns about cyberbullying.

This study found Catholic school teachers who self-reported higher technology skills perceived a greater responsibility in addressing cyberbullying. This finding was consistent with

Graves (2013), who found that “digitally-wise” teachers perceived they were able to handle cyberbullying effectively. Future studies should investigate the correlation between teachers’ self-reported technology skills and teachers’ perceived responsibility in addressing cyberbullying to capture the underlying factors directing the correlation.

### **Relationships among Composite Variables**

A positive relationship was found that indicated teachers who perceived a responsibility in addressing cyberbullying also perceived an ability to effectively respond to incidences of cyberbullying. The results of Research Question Four showed that teachers did not perceive themselves as having the ability to effectively respond to cyberbullying. Because the correlation between perceived responsibility and perceived ability to respond was positive, the relationship should be explored further with the goal of increasing teachers’ ability to respond to incidences of cyberbullying.

### **Implications for Practice**

The following recommendations for practice were derived from the key findings of this study:

1. Less than half of the Catholic school teachers indicated they knew how to recognize cyberbullying issues or how to respond in an appropriate manner. Based on these findings, the expansion of professional development programs is recommended to increase teachers’ awareness of cyberbullying
2. Utilizing the stages of the bystander intervention theory, it is apparent that teachers need a better understanding of the laws governing cyberbullying and increased knowledge of how to respond to incidences of cyberbullying. Comprehensive training should be



provided to educate teachers about the law and how to effectively respond to cyberbullying.

3. Catholic school teachers who self-reported higher technology skills perceived a greater responsibility in addressing cyberbullying. The researcher suggests teachers' technology skills may have been affected by professional training and development that addressed students' use of technology and online safety. Professional development addressing online safety should be expanded to a larger majority of Catholic school teachers.
4. Although the vast majority of the Catholic school teachers surveyed had a valid teacher's license, less than half were able to recognize or effectively respond to cyberbullying. Teacher preparation programs should be evaluated and required to provide training to teachers on how to recognize and effectively manage cyberbullying.
5. While Catholic schools typically do not have to recognize students' First Amendment rights to freedom of expression, negligence law still applies to Catholic schools. School administrators and teachers must foresee any possible injury associated with cyberbullying and take care to protect students from harm. Persistent attention to private school law and current case analysis should be an ongoing practice at the diocesan and superintendent level with the intent to disseminate legal information and direction to principals and teachers.
6. Over a third of Catholic school teachers did not agree that it was their responsibility to promote moral behavior when children used the Internet. Fundamentally, Catholic schools are committed to the development of the whole child, and it is the school's "duty to cultivate human values" (John Paul II, 1979), including moral behavior—a defining

characteristic of Catholic schools. This finding suggests that Catholic school administrators should examine the culture and characteristics of their schools and their alignment with Catholic Social Teachings.

### **Future Studies**

A small and insufficient amount of research addressing teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying exists in the literature. At the time of this study (March 2015) only 10 journal articles examining teacher perceptions of cyberbullying had been published. Of the 10 articles, only one study researched teachers in the United States and none of the studies examined Catholic school teachers' perceptions. The consequences of cyberbullying are as detrimental as the consequences of face-to-face bullying; however, face-to-face bullying has a plethora of research. The researcher recognizes that cyberbullying is a more recent phenomena compared to face-to-face bullying; however, the dearth of cyberbullying research in the United States and the absence of studies in Catholic schools is an enigma to this researcher. Future studies should examine best practices of international researchers and uncover why other countries are more invested in cyberbullying research.

This study only surveyed teachers in Catholic schools. Public schools are accountable to federal and state laws, and these statues could also apply to Catholic schools receiving substantial state action. The survey should be extended to include teachers in public schools to compare policies and best practices. Examining cyberbullying curricula and staff training in public schools could, in turn, provide data to assist in more effective programs to address cyberbullying in Catholic schools.

Nearly 10% of Catholic school teachers agreed that cyberbullying was normal adolescent behavior and cyberbullying prepared students for difficult situations in life. The results of these two survey items conflict with the themes of equality and dignity inherent in Catholic Social Teachings and the core principle affirming the dignity of the human person (John XXII, 1961). The results from these two survey items merit additional qualitative research to explore the underpinnings of the Catholic school teachers' responses. A comprehensive examination of teachers' agreement that cyberbullying is normal adolescent behavior should be explored to determine if acknowledging cyberbullying as normal adolescent behavior equates to agreeing that cyberbullying is also acceptable adolescent behavior. The researcher acknowledges that this finding may be ambiguous and that additional research is needed.

All of the teachers perceived cyberbullying as a problem across the country; however, less than half of the same group indicated that cyberbullying was a problem at their current school. Further research should be conducted to identify factors responsible for the perception of low incidences of cyberbullying at teachers' schools in comparison to higher incidences nationwide. Studies should collect actual data about incidences of cyberbullying from all stakeholders, including administrators, parents, and students at Catholic schools and assess if it aligns with teachers' perceptions.

School administrators along with diocesan superintendents are the decision makers and leaders for Catholic institutions. They are instrumental in providing guidance to teachers. The researcher found no literature that examined Catholic school administrators or superintendents' understandings of education law in Catholic schools. The researcher suggests exploring the

understanding of the law from the perspective of school administrators and superintendents to assure knowledgeable leaders who can disseminate legal directives to teachers.

## APPENDIX

### Survey

#### **An Examination of Teachers' Perceptions of Cyberbullying**

Please select one answer for each of the following questions.

Q1.1 Are you male or female?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Q1.2 What is your race/ethnic membership?

- American Indian/Alaskan Native (1)
- Asian (2)
- Black/African American (3)
- Hispanic/Latino (4)
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (5)
- White (6)

Q1.3 What is your age (in years)?

Q1.4 How long (in years) have you been a teacher?

Q1.5 How long (in years) have you been at your current school?

Q1.6 What grade(s) do you teach? If you teach multiple grade levels, please indicate the most frequently taught grades.

- Kindergarten to Grade 5 (1)
- Grade 6 to Grade 8 (2)
- Grade 9 to Grade 12 (3)

Q1.7 Do you teach in a Catholic school or a public school?

- Catholic school (1)
- Public school (2)

Q1.8 Do you have a valid teacher's license?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q1.9 Do you teach in a predominantly general education classroom or a special education classroom?

- General Education (1)
- Special Education (2)

Q1.10 What is the highest degree you have attained?

- Bachelors (1)
- Masters (2)
- Specialist (3)
- Doctorate (4)

Q1.11 Have you attended a professional development session(s) on cyberbullying?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q1.12 Have you had a course in school law?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q1.13 How would you describe your technology skills?

- Below-Basic (need full support) (1)
- Basic (beginner with support) (2)
- Intermediate (need periodic support) (3)
- Proficient (confident on my own) (4)
- Advanced (capable of teaching others) (5)

Q1.14 How would you describe your knowledge of school law?

- Below-Basic (1)
- Basic (2)
- Intermediate (3)
- Proficient (4)
- Advanced (5)

Q1.15 Have you been personally involved in bullying or cyberbullying prevention activities in your school, district, or diocese?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q1.16 Has a student reported to you that he/she had been cyberbullied?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

For the remainder of the survey, please use the following definition of cyberbullying as a reference: "Cyberbullying is the willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012, p. 32). Please indicate to what extent you disagree or agree with the following statements:

Q1.17 I am concerned about cyberbullying.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.19 I feel it is important for teachers to help victims of cyberbullying.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.18 Cyberbullying violates the dignity of the human person.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.20 It is part of my responsibility as a teacher to respond if cyberbullying originates on campus.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.21 It is part of my responsibility as a teacher to respond if cyberbullying originates off campus.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.22 Promoting moral behaviors when children use the Internet is the parent's obligation, not the teacher's obligation.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.23 There is not much a school can do to protect students from cyberbullying by other students.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.24 Teachers know how to recognize cyberbullying issues and how to intervene in an appropriate manner.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.25 Cyberbullying is normal adolescent behavior.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.26 Cyberbullying prepares students for difficult situations that life inevitably produces.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)



Q1.27 It makes me angry when students are cyberbullied.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.28 Cyberbullying is a problem in schools nationally.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.29 Cyberbullying is a problem at my current school.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.30 School resources should be used to help teachers deal with cyberbullying.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.31 Cyberbullying is just as important as other topics I want covered in professional development sessions.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.32 Schools should discipline students involved in cyberbullying.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.33 Consequences for cyberbullying are consistently enforced at my current school.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.34 I am able to effectively respond to incidences of cyberbullying.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.35 My current school has a clear cyberbullying policy.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.36 Students in Catholic schools have the right to say anything they want online, even if it hurts someone or violates someone's privacy.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q1.37 Students in public schools have the right to say anything they want online, even if it hurts someone or violates someone's privacy.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Please indicate if the statement is True or False.

Q1.38 Federal law mandates that schools respond to incidences of cyberbullying.

- True (1)
- False (2)

Q1.39 California has no bullying or cyberbullying laws.

- True (1)
- False (2)

Q1.40 If cyberbullying is linked to school disruption, schools can administer disciplinary action.

- True (1)
- False (2)

Q1.41 California Education Code permits schools to discipline students involved in cyberbullying that originates on or off campus.

- True (1)
- False (2)

Q1.42 California legislation has defined bullying to include electronic acts which can be grounds for suspension or expulsion

- True (1)
- False (2)

Q1.43 Public school districts can be held liable for negligence in a civil suit for improperly responding to cyberbullying incidents.

- True (1)
- False (2)

Q1.44 Catholic school dioceses can be held liable for negligence in a civil suit for improperly responding to cyberbullying incidents.

- True (1)
- False (2)

Q1.45 Catholic schools have no jurisdiction over what happens outside of school and cannot discipline students for cyberbullying.

- True (1)
- False (2)

Q1.46 Public schools have no jurisdiction over what happens outside of school and cannot discipline students for cyberbullying.

- True (1)
- False (2)

Q1.47 Students in Catholic schools shed their Constitutional rights to freedom of speech at the schoolhouse gate.

- True (1)
- False (2)

Q1.48 Students in public schools shed their Constitutional rights to freedom of speech at the schoolhouse gate.

- True (1)
- False (2)

Q1.49 Public schools are government agents and subject to Constitutional restrictions.

- True (1)
- False (2)

Q1.50 Catholic schools are government agents and subject to Constitutional restrictions.

- True (1)
- False (2)

Q1.51 Students are entitled to Constitutional rights when attending Catholic schools that receive government subsidies.

- True (1)
- False (2)

Please add any additional comments you would like to share.

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