


Silent Voices: The Perception of Cyberbullying Among At-Risk Middle School Students

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, face-to-face bullying has been major problem among adolescents, especially those deemed at-risk. With the rise in the use of and advancements in mobile technologies, the Internet 2.0, and smart phones, a new form of bullying has been on the rise resulting from the increase in access to technologies and by association, social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Cyberbullying, as it has been denoted, can occur at any time of the day on all social media platforms resulting in the potential of face-to-face victims enduring the abuse of their aggressors on an almost 24/7 basis. As such, cyberbullying can trigger numerous emotional and physical stressors among students. The purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions middle school students have about cyberbullying and their role as either victim, perpetrator, or bystander. The results of the study speak to a broader and emerging narrative indicating the psychological challenges faced by developing adolescent minds in negotiating face-to-face and virtual relationships.

KEYWORDS

Aggressor, At-Risk Adolescents, Bystander, Corporal Analysis, Cyberbully, Cyberbullying, Prosocial Efficacy Survey, Psychology, Reinforcer, Traditional Bullying, Victims

INTRODUCTION

Conventional, face-to-face bullying has been (and continues to be) a major problem among students from the classrooms to the hallways and beyond, especially among students who have been identified as “at-risk”. An at-risk student, according the National Center for Education Statistics (2019) is one that is generally defined as failing at school academically and socially. The NCES identified seven (7) attributes characteristic of the at-risk population. For the study here, three of the seven are of focus – student’s academic history, behavioral factors, and race/ethnicity – with an additional peripheral focus on parental involvement in the student’s life both in terms of academics, personal relationships, and socioemotional support and development. Of note, marginalized students, particularly those from different racial and ethnic backgrounds with low socioeconomic status, tend to be at even greater risk for victimization (Hoffman & Daigle, 2019).

A common definition of traditional bullying is stated as the following (Olweus & Limber, 2017): “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” (p. 139). Bullying is perceived as a power imbalance between aggressors and their victims with the former seeking to socioemotionally disarm

DOI: 10.4018/IJCBPL.2019100101

the latter leaving her/him unable to defend her/himself mentally or physically. In schools, victims constantly deal with their aggressors and even though the victims may seek help from school personnel, aggressors often continue the bullying during the school day. Traditional bullying can oftentimes not only hard to recognize but it carries with it negative effects on students' mental well-being such as making students feel sad, angry, or depressed (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018).

In the past few years, a new form of bullying has been on the rise resultant from the increase in access to mobile technologies including smart phones, and by association, social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The method is called cyberbullying; it can occur at any time of the day on all social media platforms (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2018). Victims of traditional bullying, who characteristically only dealt with their aggressors during the confines of the school day, are now subjected to almost 24/7 due to the open-ended nature of social media platforms. Social media is a prominent platform for cyberbullies to prey on their victims because aggressors have the ability to readily obscure their identity and physical location, which makes it more difficult for those in authority to identify the actual aggressor.

UNDERSTANDING TRADITIONAL VERSUS CYBERBULLYING

As noted in multiple areas of research on traditional face-to-face bullying, it can assume many forms. For example, it can include repetitive and deliberate behaviors meant to mentally, physically, or socially isolate the targeted victim. Such punitive behaviors include physical threats, social exclusion, spreading rumors, verbal abuse, and the like. While identifying traditional bullying is somewhat more tangible as it is physically or aurally observable in real space and time, cyberbullying, due to its technology-based platform, can often be more difficult to identify. However, cyberbullying can assume similar forms to traditional bullying in the aggressor's latent intent to cause emotional and even threat of physical harm to the intended victim (Wright, 2019). Accordingly, cyberbullying can include physical threats such as hacking, creating fake profiles of the victim or flaming social media accounts to emotional abuse sent through illicit emails, text messages, or direct messages. As a result, students and other stakeholders such as administrators, parents, and teachers may find it difficult to compartmentalize what cyberbullying actually entails without referencing first traditional bullying. Thus, it can be challenging to differentiate traditional face-to-face versus cyberbullying as there may exist a perception overlap between the two in addition to the complicating factor that they exist in parallel yet separate venues of space and time.

Defining Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is the use of electronic communication, such as social media, email, text messaging, and the like, to bully someone (Ockerman, Kramer, & Bruno, 2014). The two sets of articles in this section differ from each other; one set of authors discuss the difficulties of identifying cyberbullying while the others discuss how cyberbullying can be identified. Olweus and Limber (2017) assert there are difficulties when conducting research on cyberbullying and suggest that individuals should be informed about the key differences between cyberbullying and traditional bullying. The authors support this claim by doing the following: first, they provide definitions for the terms cyberbullying and traditional bullying; next, they provide examples as to the reason people commonly mistake the two terms; last, they give the reader information on the degree of overlap between cyberbullying and traditional bullying. Olweus and Limber appear to write in hope of bringing awareness about cyberbullying research in order to educate the reader about the difficulties that come with that type of research.

Cumming and fellow authors discuss ways cyberbullying can be identified and provide examples to help prevent cyberbullying (Cunningham, Rimas, Mielko, Mapp, Cunningham, Buchanan, 2016). The authors suggest the following: first, they provide examples of where cyberbullying commonly occurs (e.g., social media outlets and phones); next, they present the obstacles that stand in the way

of preventing cyberbullying e.g. lack of support from school personnel and parents; last, they state the things schools should do to prevent cyberbullying.

Researcher, Lyndsay Jenkins and her colleagues, in their 2017 article, “Social and Language Skills as Predictors of Bullying Roles in Early Childhood: A Narrative Summary of the Literature,” addresses the topic of bullying roles and explain the characteristics of each role. The bystander roles of bullying are composed of four categories; these categories are assistants, reinforcers, defenders, and outsiders. Assistants help bullies commit aggressive acts; reinforcers encourage and support bullies in their aggressive acts; defenders stick up for victims of bullying; outsiders are neutral and stay out of the situations that may occur.

Different Effects of Cyberbullying

Throughout the literature on cyberbullying, different potential effects of on victims have been identified. According to Feinberg and Robey (2009), “Cyberbullying can undermine school climate, interfere with victims’ school functioning, and put some students at risk for serious mental health and safety problems” (p. 26). Cyberbullying has been linked to suicidal and other destructive behaviors. Alavi and colleagues asserted, from their study on 270 patients, that suicidal ideation is potentially linked to bullying by addressing bullying incidents and suicidal behavior among victims (Alavi, Reshetukha, Prost, Antoniak, Patel, Sajid, & Groll, 2017). By supplying the reader with statistics of suicidal attempts among 2,342 adolescents from a study, Alavi and her colleagues build their claim about the relationship between bullying and suicidal behavior; patients who dealt with suicidal behavior were victims of bullying.

Researcher, Sara Bottino and her colleagues, “Cyberbullying and Adolescent Mental Health: Systematic Review,” address the topic of mental health and argue that cyberbullying may cause mental health issues such as: depression, substance abuse, and increased suicidal ideation (Bottino, Bottino, Regina, Correia, & Ribeiro, 2015). They support this claim by providing information about cyberbullying; then, providing examples of the places victims are targeted; and finally, providing results about the way cyberbullying can lead to mental health issues. Bottino and her colleagues’ purpose was to educate their audience in order to make parents and teachers aware of how cyberbullying can have a negative impact on victims’ mental health.

The Prevalence of Cyberbullying Among Adolescents

According to Notar, Padgett and Roden (2013), “The number of children and teens who use the Internet at home is rapidly growing” (p. 1). Bullying is starting to shift from traditional face-to face to cyberspace; in the two articles in this section the authors discuss how the transition is prevalent among adolescents. In the article, “From the School Yard to Cyber Space: A Pilot Study of Bullying Behaviors Among Middle School Students” (2014), researchers Melissa Ockerman, Constance Kramer, and Michelle Bruno assert bullying behavior is prevalent among middle school students by addressing the incidence of traditional bullying and cyberbullying. By supplying the reader with an example of incidents of traditional bullying and cyberbullying, Ockerman, Kramer, and Bruno build their claim about the importance of school personnel being aware of the bullying behavior displayed in middle schools. The authors conveyed the importance of being aware of the signs of bullying in order to contribute to the prevention of bullying in schools.

A final article provides a different perspective on adolescents and their involvement in cyberbullying. Researchers, Lucy Betts, Karin Spenser, and Sarah Gardner, in their article, “Adolescents’ Involvement in Cyberbullying and Perceptions of School: The Importance of Perceived Peer Acceptance for Female Adolescents (2015),” addressed the topic of cyberbullying and argue that students’ perceptions of school are negatively affected by being victims of cyberbullying. They support this claim by presenting the issue to the reader; then, stating the key factors that play a role in the issue; and, finally, providing thorough examples of the behaviors students display in the classroom. Betts, Spenser, and Gardner’s purpose was to bring awareness to the fact that cyberbullying

can tarnish students' positive perception of school in order to educate teachers and parents about the issue so both parties could have a better chance of assisting with the issues that students face within the face-to-face and virtual socioemotional and physical interactive planes.

METHODS, MATERIALS, AND INSTRUMENTATION

Statement of the Problem

The significance of this study is that it provides a glimpse into at-risk middle-school students' perceptions of the effects of cyberbullying as opposed to traditional bullying on the academic environment and socioemotional status of themselves and other students. When it comes to cyberbullying, there are severe effects that can have a negative impact on students' performance in schools and on their mental health. Cyberbullying can trigger numerous emotional and physical stressors among students, which causes them to perform at a lower rate in their classes. Unlike traditional face-to-face bullying, cyberbullies are harder to identify making it now a preferred method of harassment and intimidation for the 21st century bully. As Betts, et al. stated:

“Young people's experiences of bullying are evolving. Previously bullying experiences were typically confined to school and would end with the school day. However, our increasing connectivity, the rapidly evolving digital world, and the pervasiveness of technology have together transformed face-to face bullying into a new form: cyberbullying (p. 471)”.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions middle school students attending an intensive summer academic program for at-risk students regarding identified roles in cyberbullying. The study focused on the primary roles and secondary roles of cyberbullying incidents; the primary roles consisted of the bullies and victims and the secondary roles consisted of the assistant, defender, and outsider (Jenkins, Mulvey, & Floress, 2017). Throughout the research, middle school students, who have been in either a primary or bystander role of bullying, were interviewed to understand the perception that they have on cyberbullying; primary roles were denoted as the bully and victim, while the bystander roles consisted of the bystander or reinforcer.

Research Questions

For this research, data was gathered to answer the following two research questions:

RQ1: What perceptions do at-risk middle school students have on cyberbullying?

RQ2: Is it difficult for at-risk middle school students to speak out about cyberbullying?

Methodology

The methodology used in this study was framed around a qualitative case study. Specifically, a case-based action research model was used as it is a preferred methodology, particularly among classroom-focused educational researchers, in identifying organizational weaknesses and providing tangible solutions (Bogdan, & Bilken, 1992). Accordingly and within the action research prevue, a step-based approach was used in identifying the problem, collecting and analyzing data.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Procedures

The participants of the study were seven middle school students participating in a summer learning community program for at-risk students in a public middle school in a southeastern state during the summer of 2018 ($N = 7$). Four girls and three boys between the ages of 12 and 13 were identified as participants. The students were administered a survey to complete during week 1 of the 8-week in-

field observational cycle at the intensive summer learning program. After the survey was completed, students were then categorized, based on their responses to questions 15-19 on the prosocial efficacy survey, under the identifiers of a primary or secondary role in the cyberbullying. From those results, the purposive, non-random sampling of students that were selected were those students who were identified in the primary roles of cyberbullying (i.e. bully or victim) or secondary roles (i.e. bystander or reinforcer) based on their self-reporting via survey. As a follow-up to the prosocial efficacy survey, one-on-one interviews (accompanied by observational field notes) of the purposive sample of students were conducted to align better the results of the survey with aural responses as recorded.

The prosocial efficacy survey is a nineteen-question survey that asked students about their social skills. The survey was administered to the middle school students at the beginning of their 8-week intensive summer learning program. The questions of primary focus were questions 5, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 (see Appendix A). The questions specifically pertained to primary and secondary roles adopted in the cyberbullying; the responses given by the students resulted in the categorization of the middle school student participants in the different roles of bystander, bully, reinforcer or victim. Once the students' roles were categorized, students were interviewed, face-to-face, based on the following set of questions. The questions were intentionally written in a casual, more conversational manner to lower students' affective filters (i.e. socioemotional state) such that the likelihood of more forthright answers would, by design, increase:

Interview Questions

1. Have you ever been a victim to cyberbullying?
2. In what ways do you think cyberbullying affect others?
3. Do you know someone who has been cyber bullied, if so, did you help that person out?
4. Have you ever helped someone cyber bully another person?
5. Have you ever witnessed someone get cyber bullied and didn't do anything to help, if so why didn't you help?
6. Have you ever cyber bullied someone, if so why did you do it and how did it make you feel afterwards?
7. If your friend was being cyber bullied, do you think that would cause you to get stressed?

Using Voyant

Voyant is a word-level data analyzer that has three features to facilitate a corporal text analysis (Voyant Tools [Computer Software], 2018). The first tool is the reader in which the selected text is pasted into to conduct an analysis. The second tool is the cirrus; this feature provides a word cloud view of the most frequently used words in the text and how they are linked. The third tool is the trend and this feature provides a line graph of the relative word-level frequencies within the document. All three tools were used in the analysis of the interviews to be later correlated to the corresponding prosocial self-efficacy surveys of the students selected for follow-up interviews. These tools were also used in analyzing the field notes for interpretation of results and suggestions for future inquiries.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to data collection, parents/guardians of middle school students grades 6-8 attending the intensive summer program for at-risk youth were presented with an informed-consent form explaining the nature of the research, its importance to the broader field of teaching and learning (especially bullying and cyberbullying among at-risk youth), and its minimal impact on students participating in the surveys. As a result, seven students were permitted by their parent/guardian to participate in the study. The middle school students were administered a survey before the interviews; the surveys were collected and seven participants ($N = 7$) were selected to be interviewed based on their responses to questions 15-19 in the prosocial efficacy survey. The study's participants were interviewed one-on-one outside of

the classroom setting. The interviews were recorded for later transcription and corporal-level analysis using Voyant. Before recording and starting the interview, selected students received additional information related to the purpose of the study and why they were selected for an additional follow-up interview. To further encourage authentic answers to the interview questions, students were insured that their answers and identities would be anonymous. The interviews were recorded using the audio recording capabilities of an iPhone for later transcription and analysis. The interviewer was a 24-year old Black male, professionally certified teacher, and graduate research fellow working as a teaching mentor in the summer intensive program.

RESULTS

Interviews from the Field

Below are the actual interviews among the seven student-participants who, after completing the prosocial efficacy survey, were interviewed to determine their perceived roles in cyberbullying episodes as either the bully, bystander, reinforcer, or victim. The interviews were recorded outside of the regular classroom setting to ensure participants could speak more freely in a private setting. The interviews were recorded using an iPhone and later transcribed into a Word document for later corporal-level analysis. Hand-written field notes were recorded during and after the interviews and were also transcribed in a Word document for future analysis and used in interpreting the results and drawing conclusions for future areas of inquiry.

Interview 1 (Victim)

1. Alright participant 1 we will start with interview question one; make sure you speak clearly and loudly so the phone can actually hear you. Have ever been a victim to cyberbullying? Sometimes
2. In what ways do you think cyberbullying affects others? online when you go to social media it should be about having fun, but when you cyberbully on platforms like Facebook, instagram, and Twitter it turns it into (slight pause) ummm oh. I thought I could escape not being bullied but now I'm being bullied here too.

Can you elaborate on how cyberbullying can affect others and what do you think happens to a person? Well it makes them feel insecure and it makes them feel that they're not going to be liked by anybody outside of their family and they won't have any friends.

3. Question number 3 Do you know someone who has been cyber bullied if so did you help that person out? Well I haven't known anybody being cyber bullied.
4. Question 4 have you ever helped someone cyber bully another person? No I never have
5. Ok question 5: have you ever witnessed someone getting bullied and didn't do anything to help if so why didn't you help? Well I did witness somebody getting bullied, but I didn't go and help just because with the school I was going to everyone knew each other and was playful and it was something that happened so I believe it was bullying but in the back of my mind I thought uh they're just playing around or something like that so I just left it alone.
6. Question 6: Have you ever bullied someone if so why did you do it and how did it make you feel afterwards? I have never bullied anybody because I've always been taught that treat somebody how you would want them to treat you so I never liked being bullied so I wouldn't want anybody else to be bullied.

7. Last question if your friend was being bullied do you think that would cause you to get stressed? Yeah I would obviously think about it a lot. Like what did my friend do wrong to that person why are they being bullied and I don't know if I could stop it or not, so yeah it would stress me out.

Interview 1 Field Notes

Participant one was very knowledgeable on the topic of cyberbullying. The participant displayed a relaxed body language; the participant was not afraid to answer the interview questions and provided past experiences with the interviewer. The participant being interviewed mentioned that he or she has been a victim to cyberbullying; the interviewee seemed very passionate about treating others with respect.

Interview 2 (Reinforcer)

1. Have you ever been a victim to cyberbullying? No
2. In what ways do you think cyberbullying affect others? Umm (slight pause) cyberbullying affects others; people kill themselves over it. It's not good to do it because people kill themselves over it.
3. Do you know someone who has been cyber bullied, if so did you help that person out? Umm (slight pause) No I haven't known somebody who has been cyber bullied
4. Have you ever helped someone bully another person? No.
5. Have you ever witnessed someone get bullied and didn't do anything to help, if so why didn't you help? Yes in some instances I have just stood there and not say anything. Why didn't you help? Sometimes I don't think anything of it; it just goes through my mind. I don't laugh or nothing.
6. Have you ever bullied someone, if so why did you do it and how did it make you feel afterwards? Yeah (slight pause) We did this thing in class where we were rating females. How did that make you feel? I mean I didn't think it was bullying; I didn't feel that a female would go up to me and be like oh why would you do this stuff. I felt like I wasn't bullying in a sense, but yeah.
7. If your friend was being bullied, do you think that would cause you to get stressed? I mean not necessarily; I would only get stressed if they stress me about and keep talking about it over and over again.

Interview 2 Field Notes

The participant was very cooperative during the interview. The interviewee had moments where he or she would take slight pauses before answering a question. In a past experience that the interviewee shared; the interviewee participated in an act that could be labeled as cyberbullying. When the interviewer explained that the act was cyberbullying the interviewee was shocked and went into defense by explaining that he or she didn't know that the incident fell under the category of cyberbullying.

Interview 3 (Victim)

1. Have you ever been a victim to cyberbullying? Not cyberbullying; I experienced like regular bullying in school wise, but not online.
2. In what ways do you think cyber-bullying affect others? Some people they kill themselves; some people do harsh things to themselves like cutting themselves. Some people go to adults and let them know, but not all people have the courage to do that. Do you know anyone that's ever cut themselves? Yes
3. Do you know someone who has been cyber bullied, if so did you help that person out? No not cyber bullied

4. Have you ever helped someone bully another person? Yes I guess you can say that. How did you feel? Well this one time I did feel some type of way because I thought about if that happened to me then I would've been hurt. Another time I just laughed you know cause I was with some friends and it was funny at the time.
5. Have you ever witnessed someone get bullied and didn't do anything to help, if so why didn't you help? Ummm yes because that situation didn't really have anything to do with me, but I do wish that I probably did something like go get a teacher or something.
6. Have you ever bullied someone, if so why did you do it and how did it make you feel afterwards? Like I said I have. Sometimes it's a little laugh with some friends and sometimes I didn't feel comfortable with it.
7. If your friend was being bullied, do you think that would cause you to get stressed? Well it depends on how close I am to that person; like if it was my best friend that was getting bullied I'd probably be there for them. Like are you all right and then I'd be stressed out because I'd be worried about what's going on with them and not what's important like school and stuff like that.

Interview 3 Field Notes

The participant was not afraid to share his or her personal experiences of being a victim to bullying. The participant was honest and shared with the interviewer that there were times that he or she bullied another person for jokes; the participant also confessed that he or she did not feel comfortable with bullying others. The body language displayed by the participant was relaxed. There weren't any pauses and he or she was able to expound upon their answers to the interview questions.

Interview 4 (Aggressor)

1. Have you ever been a victim to cyberbullying? (Long pause) I don't want to talk about it. I mean it wasn't really bad
2. In what ways do you think cyber-bullying affect others? It can cause them to harm themselves and feel bad about themselves. Do you know any ways a person would harm themselves? They can kill themselves
3. Do you know someone who has been cyber bullied, if so did you help that person out? Not that I remember
4. Have you ever helped someone bully another person? Shakes head
5. Have you ever witnessed someone get bullied and didn't do anything to help, if so why didn't you help? Yes but (brief pause) I think I did help. What did you say to the bully? I can aggressive and say you shouldn't do that.
6. Have you ever bullied someone, if so why did you do it and how did it make you feel afterwards? It made me feel bad and guilty. Why did you do it? Say for instance you started messing with me and (brief pause) Imma come back at you harder, if you understand what I'm saying. I don't really bother anybody. So you're saying you bully others as self defense? Yes.
7. If your friend was being bullied, do you think that would cause you to get stressed? Somewhat

Participant 4 Field Notes

During the interview participant four seemed very reserved and spoke in a low town. The interviewer was able to sense that the participant was a little hesitant to answer the questions about the topic of cyberbullying at the beginning of the interview. The participant's body language expressed that there was some guilt about bullying others and being a victim to it. While speaking on past incidents of bullying, participant confessed that bullying others was used as a defense mechanism. Overall there was some great cooperation from the interviewee.

Interview 5 (Reinforcer)

1. Have you ever been a victim to cyberbullying? No
2. In what ways do you think cyber-bullying affect others? Emotionally and physically. What do you think a victim to cyberbullying does to him or herself? I have a family member that cut herself from stress and depression. She tried to jump off a building.
3. Do you know someone who has been cyber bullied, if so did you help that person out? I actually helped my family member out by fighting the boy; I wouldn't say that's actually helping it but it solved it because he stopped messing with her. She's fine now.
4. Have you ever helped someone bully another person? Now it's not like that I just bully random people. If you bully my friend, we will come back and bully you so yeah I did that before.
5. Have you ever witnessed someone get bullied and didn't do anything to help, if so why didn't you help? No if I see someone getting bullied I'll stick up for them.
6. Have you ever bullied someone, if so why did you do it and how did it make you feel afterwards? I never bully people; I'm a playful person I make people laugh.
7. If your friend was being bullied, do you think that would cause you to get stressed? Yeah it would, if I see how he's like changing. If I see he's not playing basketball anymore or come over to play video games then yeah I'll get stressed.

Interview 5 Field Notes

Throughout the interview participant 5 was very calm and was not afraid to cooperate with the interviewer. With each question asked, participant 5 gave in depth responses by speaking about multiple past experiences. The participant showed no emotions, when admitting that a close relative almost committed suicide from being victimized by bullying; it seems as if the participant learned how to mask his or her emotions about the situation.

Interview 6 (Bystander)

1. Have you ever been a victim to cyberbullying? (Long pause) ummmm no. I had people say something negative, but I just ignore it.
2. In what ways do you think cyber-bullying affect others? Mentally and I feel like it can lead up to suicide.
3. Do you know someone who has been cyber bullied, if so did you help that person out? No
4. Have you ever helped someone bully another person? No
5. Have you ever witnessed someone get bullied and didn't do anything to help, if so why didn't you help? I've seen lots of people in my lifetime get bullied. I just don't want it to be my problem because and everyone has their issues of their own, but sometimes I be like ok that's enough you need to back off. Most of the time it's just boys dealing with boys so I can't mess with that.
6. Have you ever bullied someone, if so why did you do it and how did it make you feel afterwards? No
7. If your friend was being bullied, do you think that would cause you to get stressed? It does because I'm trying to worry about what I got to do and now I'm worried about what their problem is.

Interview 6 Field Notes

The participant seemed very relaxed throughout the interview and cooperated with the interviewer. The participant would take frequent pauses before answering some of the interview questions; this could be a result of either the interviewee was nervous or trying to find the right words to answer each question.

6. Have you ever bullied someone, if so why did you do it and how did it make you feel afterwards?
No
7. If your friend was being bullied, do you think that would cause you to get stressed? Yeah a little bit like if they were like worried a lot then I would've probably tried to help them and that would take away time away from me if you get what I'm saying.

Interview 7 Field Notes

The interview went by pretty quick; the participant elaborated only on the questions that pertained to him or herself. The participant was engaged in the interview and wasn't hesitant to respond to the interview questions. It was interesting to hear a defender admit that he or she didn't help out a victim in the past in fear of being teased by others.

Corpus and Word-Level Visualization of Trends among Interview Responses

The Voyant on-line corpus analysis tool was used to examine and extract key trends from the language used by the Figure one shows a visual representation of the words that were frequently used during the interview sessions with the seven participants. The visual is a word cloud produced by the Voyant tool and the words that appear in a small font indicate that the words weren't used so much throughout the interview responses. The words with a bigger font indicate that the word was frequently used by the seven participants. This was the same for the field notes taken during the interviews as well.

Figure 1 shows a visual representation of the words that were frequently used during the interview sessions with the seven participants. The visual is a word cloud produced by the Voyant tool, and the words that appear in a small font indicate that the words were used with less frequency throughout the interview responses. The words with a larger font indicate that the word was frequently used by the seven participants.

Figure 2 shows a word count of the top ten frequently used words that were used in the interviews. The word count was used to correlate better the responses to the prosocial efficacy survey versus the selected student responses from the one-on-one interviews and field notes.

Figure 3 shows the frequencies of the five different word trends throughout the interviews. The word bullied showed a more frequent trend across the interviews, while the word help was not mentioned so much in the participants' responses.

Throughout the study, significant insight was obtained related to the different perceptions that the middle school students had on cyberbullying. Of note during the data analysis were the following: 1. Some of the student responses on the survey in term so their role did not match their interview questions; and 2. After the interviews were completed, initial role assignments based on the surveys were changed according to the students' interview responses. Accordingly, it was important here to further match the interviews to the field notes for further clarification of perceived and actual roles.

Victims

Participants one and three both fell under the category of being a victim to bullying. Although both participants were victims, their responses were completely opposite from each other. Participant one expressed his true feelings with his responses; he took the questions very serious and was able to thoroughly express how bullying affected him as a person. Participant three didn't express how being a victim to bullying made her feel, but she did reveal that she bullied someone before which made the researcher wonder why participant three failed to respond truthfully in her survey.

Aggressor

Participant four was categorized as an aggressor. During the interview participant four admitted that she bullied other people. What shocked the researcher was the fact that participant four admitted that she only bullied other people as self defense. Participant four explained that she doesn't bother anybody at all unless she is being targeted. Participant four also explained that she would be willing

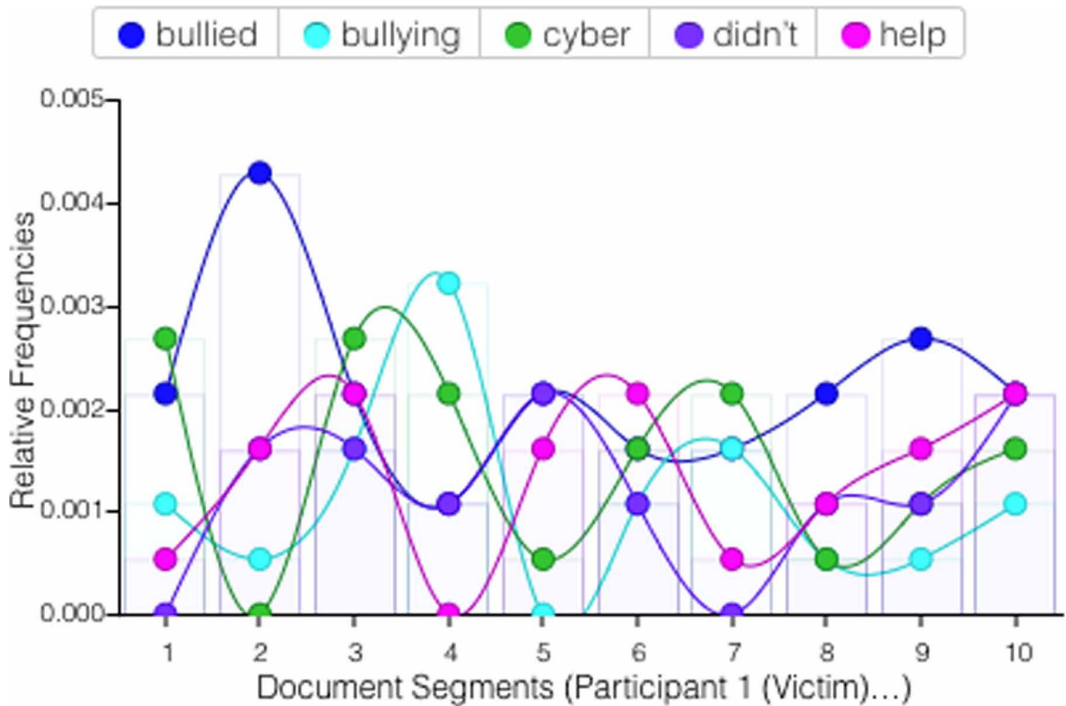
Figure 2. Word frequency (Voyant tool number 3 – reader) indicating top ten words from participant interviews

		Term	Count
<input type="checkbox"/>	1	bullied	41
<input type="checkbox"/>	2	cyber	28
<input type="checkbox"/>	3	help	25
<input type="checkbox"/>	4	didn't	22
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	bullying	21
<input type="checkbox"/>	6	think	20
<input type="checkbox"/>	7	like	19
<input type="checkbox"/>	8	person	19
<input type="checkbox"/>	9	feel	17
<input type="checkbox"/>	10	bully	13

Trends

Based off the data from the interview field notes, there were a few trends between the seven participants. Some of the participants were very hesitant, when it came to answering the interview questions; in order to get answers out of those particular participants, patience and probing with follow-up questions were employed. Another trend was the body language that the participants displayed in the interviews. The body language displayed was either reserved or nonchalant, and differed according to the students' gender. However, students did appear to be forthright in their responses. For future studies, these different trends should be looked at ore carefully to gain deeper insight into the increasingly complex world of cyberbullying.

Figure 3. Trends (Voyant tool number 3 – reader) and frequencies of the five most frequently used words during the interviews



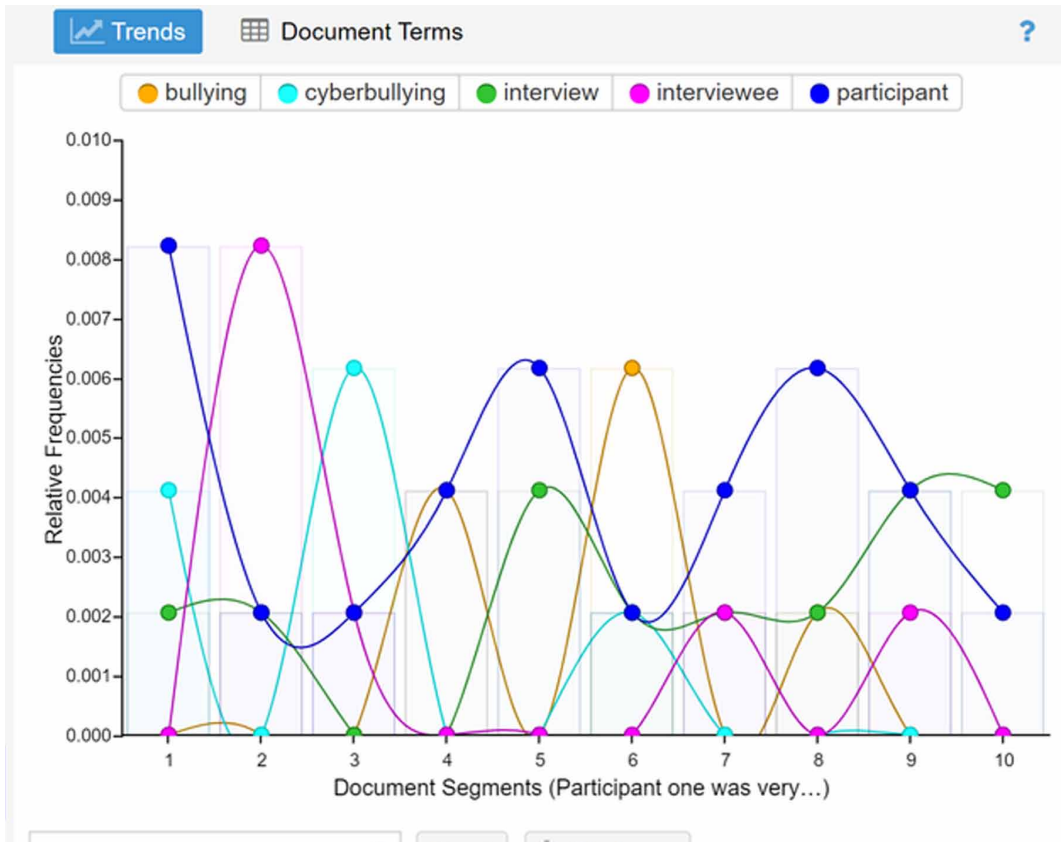
CONCLUSION

This work was entitled *Silent Voices* as cyberbullying lends itself a particularly veiled form of bullying in which a victim is more easily silenced through abstract notions of interactions in virtual time and space. The study conducted here was a cursory examination of the different effects cyberbullying has on at-risk middle school students as opposed to traditional face-to-face bullying. By categorizing the seven participants into the different bullying roles, it was easier to understand the perceptions middle school students had on cyberbullying. While each participant provided her/his unique perspective on the subject, there presented numerous avenues for future research on the topic. A larger number of participants among all middle school grades and ages would be instructive. Follow-up interviews after initial data analysis with more in-depth questions is in order. As the interviewer was a male, the introduction of a female interviewer may provide different results. A comparative analysis between students considered at-risk and not at-risk would be highly informative. Subdividing and comparing racial and ethnic groups with a study is warranted. Further, correlation between roles and gender would provide another layer of insight as well. In conclusion, especially as technologies change and social media outlets continue to dominate our social and physical interactions, more studies will need to be conducted as educational research finds itself at the precipice of understanding the long-term effects of cyberbullying on student academic success, cognitive development, and social growth.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors of *Silent Voices* would like to acknowledge Partners United for Research Pathways Oriented to Social Justice in Education (PURPOSE) and its affiliated partners Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), Florida State University (FSU), and North Florida Freedom Schools (NFFS), a non-profit selected by the Children's Defense Fund to operate summer enrichment

Figure 5. Word frequency (Voyant tool number 3 – reader) indicating top ten words from field notes



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~Rattlers will strike, and strike, and strike again!~

* Note* The PURPOSE research training fellowship is funded through the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) research grant #R305B170017.

APPENDIX A

Prosocial Efficacy Survey

Circle what you think you can do! ☺

1. I can make friends easily.



2. I can be a good friend.



3. I can relate to others well.



4. I can share with others easily.



5. I can stick up for people when they are teased.



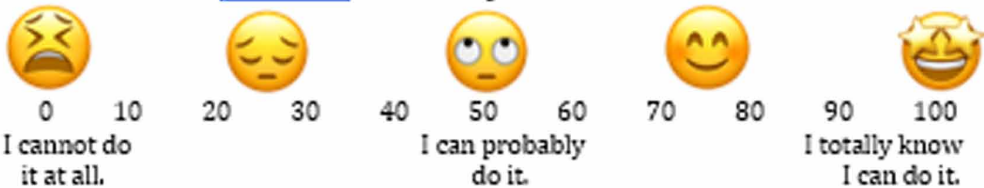
6. I can communicate well.



7. I can be friends with someone who is different than me.



8. When there is a problem I can help fix it.



9. I can do new things and not fail.



10. I can be respectful of others.



11. I can help promote peace.



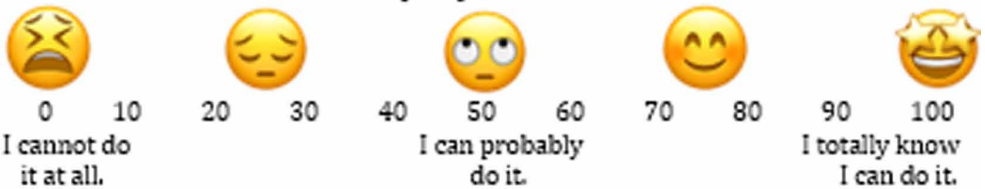
12. I feel like I can make a difference in other people's lives.



13. If I see someone getting picked on, I can do something to help.



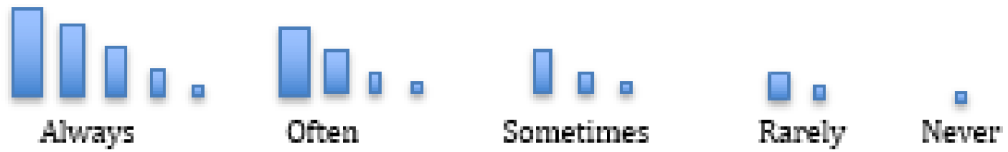
14. I can share how I feel with people.



15. I see people get picked on.



16. I get picked on.



17. I pick on other people.



18. I defend my friend, who picks on other people.



19. I defend someone being picked on.



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