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Article Critique #4
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Li, Q. (2006). Cyberbullying in schools: A research of gender differences. *School psychology international*, 27(2), 157-170.

Theoretical Perspective

Critique the author's conceptual framework.

The author begins her research with an explanation of school violence, a wide-ranging topic which must include bullying but clearly has many other iterations. The conceptual framework used here is primarily related to traditional, rather than cyber, bullying because there is limited prior research which has been conducted on cyberbullying. The logic of using traditional bullying as a foundation is a reasonable starting place for research into cyberbullying, given that there is little previous research directly on point, and the author notes that the two are likely not synonymous. She also references the fact that people in general and schools specifically are increasingly embracing technology, and that this is becoming a potential source of bullying in classrooms. Overall, the logic of the conceptual framework fits together.

Comment on the need for this study and its importance.

Given the severity of bullying, it is timely and critically important for studies to be conducted on the scope and effects of bullying; in this age of abundant technology this research must include information about cyberbullying. It is also important that research be conducted which shows who the bullies are and what bystanders choose to do when they see bullying. Li clearly makes the case that cyberbullying is a new research field in which there has been very little work done; given the results of previous studies on bullying and the dearth of prior research into cyberbullying, it is clear that more research in this area is needed. Practically speaking, any

type of bullying is detrimental to the lives of young people and the overall health of schools and communities, and so research into this area is vital.

How effectively does the author tie the study to relevant theory and prior research?

Li uses prior research and relevant theory clearly and well; the caveat to this is that there is not a large body of research on cyberbullying from which she can draw and thus she makes her case for this study with her own research and with news reports. First, Li presents literature on traditional bullying that clearly indicates that it is a significant problem; this research is contemporary and well-explained. This includes the research that is used to illustrate the gender differences that exist within traditional bullying. Li's specific evidence of cyberbullying comes from news stories reporting the existence and severity of cyberbullying, concluding with a discussion of online sexual harassment research. Given the absence of other research in the area of cyberbullying, this provides some foundation for the present study; however, support in this area could be stronger. One further limitation in Li's literature review is that she relies heavily on her own research to provide a foundation for this particular study. It is appropriate to include it, but given the lack of other research, it seems that she is the only person conducting research on cyberbullying. Perhaps this is true.

Evaluate the clarity and appropriateness of the research questions or hypotheses.

Li is extremely clear in presenting his research questions, which seem large in scope for seems to be one of the first studies conducted on cyberbullying. Li looks to answer three questions: whether there are differences in the way that male and female students experience cyberbullying; if there are differences in what students believe about adults' ability to prevent cyberbullying; and finally if male and female bystanders react similarly in terms of informing

adults of cyberbullying. Given the importance and timeliness of this study, these are important questions to be asking and given the conceptual framework are appropriate. The questions are large in scope, however, and while they are testable and objective, they cover a great deal of ground. Given the lack of previous research in this area, it seems that there is much room for research but not all of it needs to be completed in one study.

Research Design and Analysis

Critique the appropriateness and adequacy of the study's design in relation to the research questions or hypotheses.

The study's design is an observational study, since its purpose was to evaluate what was happening rather than what may happen given a particular intervention. It uses a self-reported survey as its only instrument. The researcher surveyed 264 adolescents and tabulated the results; an observational or exploratory study certainly is an appropriate method to provide information given the beginning stage of this area of research. However, while asking people about their experience of something is certainly one way to go about gaining information, here the use of self-reporting on a topic as sensitive as cyberbullying seems to be unlikely to yield reliable and valid results. Thus, the only instrument used in the study, namely the self-reported survey, is not the best choice for this research.

Critique the adequacy of the study's sampling methods (e.g., choice of participants) and their implications for generalizability.

The study used a sample of 264 adolescents from three junior high schools in a city in Canada. It is not clear how this sample was obtained. While this study was roughly evenly split between male and female participants, seventy-five percent of them were white, and all of them live in an urban setting. The purpose of the study was to provide information about

cyberbullying for all adolescents in junior high school, but it is difficult to generalize the results to young people who live in rural settings (which could have very different access to technology, among other differences) and to people who are racially different. Further, more than half of the participants in the study reported having above average grades and a paltry two percent reported having below average grades. This is either a lack of generalizability to a larger junior high population or is a function of the surveys being self-reported and participants providing incorrect information. Regardless, it detracts from the generalizability of the study.

Critique the adequacy of the study's procedures and materials (e.g., interventions, interview protocols, data collection procedures).

The survey that Li used, which had been previously used in one of her own studies, is blatantly obvious about that which it is investigating. The survey does, however, provide access to the questions that Li is proposing, and the clarity of the instrument could aid in understanding on the part of the participants. It also does not contain any measures of internal validity nor are there any other ways to see if the information that is being reported is accurate (for instance, checking with the schools to assess the grades which were reported by the participants). Other than evaluating the data against previous research, of which there is little, there is no way to assess the reliability of the information gathered in this study. Further, we do not know how or when the surveys were collected. While the study could easily be replicated, information about cyberbullying could be obtained in other ways which allow for greater reliability of the data.

Critique the appropriateness and quality (e.g., reliability, validity) of the measures used.

The study aimed to measure occurrences of cyberbullying, participants' attitudes about the ability of adults to do anything about cyberbullying, and the reporting of witnesses instances of cyberbullying to adults, all while paying attention to any gender differences in each measure.

The instrument used does allow the instances of cyberbullying to be measured. Further, the survey asks about participant attitudes and their reporting behavior. Asking junior high students about bullying is certainly one way in which to measure whether they are bullies, have been bullied, or have seen bullying (either online or in the traditional form).

Critique the adequacy of the study's data analyses. For example: Have important statistical assumptions been met? Are the analyses appropriate for the study's design? Are the analyses appropriate for the data collected?

The analyses do help to answer the research questions, appear to be done correctly, and conform to statistical standards. Unfortunately, they are not clearly presented; tables and a more detailed explanation of the analyses performed would have been helpful in evaluating this research.

Interpretation and Implications of Results

Critique the author's discussion of the methodological and/or conceptual limitations of the results.

Overall, the author addressed some of the limitations of his study; however, she missed out on evaluating the inherent problems in a observational (non-experimental) study and primarily in the use of a self-reported survey as the only instrument used in research. The author acknowledges that her sample is a limitation: it was taken in only an urban area and only represents junior high school students. The largest limitation of the study is that it was self-reported, which can be seen in the reporting of grades. The fact that over half of the participants reported having higher than average grades is either a poor sample or evidence of the problem of self-reporting. Further, the vast majority of the participants were white and middle class, both of which limit the generalizability of the study.

How consistent and comprehensive are the author's conclusions with the reported results?

The author reports in the results of this study that half of the students that she surveyed had been bullied and a quarter had been cyberbullied. A third of the participants reported being bullies, while seventeen percent reported being cyberbullies. Males and females reported being bullied equally, but males were much more likely to be bullies. Roughly half of the accounts of cyberbullying occurred more than three times, and approximately sixty-five percent of participants thought that adults tried to stop cyberbullying when made aware of its existence. Females were more likely to report cyberbullying to adults than were males. The author's discussion of these results is consistent with her reported findings.

How well did the author relate the results to the study's theoretical base?

Throughout the discussion section, the author relates his findings to the study's theoretical base. Some of his findings, including that nearly half of the cyberbullies bullied victims more than three times, were consistent with previous research. Other findings, however, contradicted previous research. For instance, prior research had found that females were more likely to use electronic communication as a means of bullying, but Li's study showed that this was not the case. On the whole, though, Li's research supports the findings of previous research, and he thoroughly explains these connections. Given the lack of prior research into cyberbullying, Li does a thorough job in pointedly connecting his findings to previous research in bullying and the limited research that was available on cyberbullying.

In your view, what is the significance of the study, and what are its primary implications for theory, future research, and practice?

Clearly in this area more studies are needed, as Li's research is one of the first studies to report on the incidence of cyberbullying. Specifically, research should be conducted with age

groups beyond junior high students, as this was the only age group which was researched in this study. Further research should also include instruments which do not solely rely on self-reporting surveys to increase the reliability of the measures. Additionally, the socioeconomic status and geographic locations of the participants who are studied should be varied in future research to allow for differences in those demographic areas. This research was observational; it would be beneficial for future research to include the methods of cyberbullying (e.g. Facebook, chat rooms, etc.) and the effects of cyberbullying on both victims and perpetrators. Finally, it would seem that given the destructive nature of this topic that research dealing with possible ways of preventing and dealing with cyberbullying would be in order.