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# Pathways to Cyber Bullying from Bystander to Participant: Secondary School Students' Perspectives

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PATHWAYS TO CYBER BULLYING FROM BYSTANDER TO PARTICIPANT:  
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

by

Michele L. Sideman

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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Western Michigan University  
December 2013

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## PATHWAYS TO CYBER BULLYING FROM BYSTANDER TO PARTICIPANT: SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

Michele L. Sideman, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2013

The author conducted a qualitative analysis of student artifacts to explore the pathway and experiences of students who had never bullied in the traditional sense but had cyber bullied through the use of social networking sites. In addition, the author explored students' understanding of the difference between traditional and cyber bullying and their perceptions of the victim receiving the online bullying messages. A transcendental phenomenological approach was employed. The student artifacts analyzed were assignments from a required ninth grade character education class, which included a self-reflective survey, journals, a six-paragraph paper, and an online photo story project.

Results indicated that students had a sound understanding of the difference between traditional and cyber bullying. They were able to clearly articulate some major differences between the two types of bullying. However, students were split on which type of bullying was worse. Their personal experiences with bullying, in either form, did not seem to be an indicator of how their opinion was formulated.

The study revealed three possible pathways by which a student who had never bullied in the traditional sense became a cyber bully. These pathways included: entertainment, revenge, or protection of a friend. The experiences of being a cyber bully

varied based on the pathway taken. Many students indicated feeling a sense of regret after engagement; however, students also reported feeling good, powerful, or a sense of indifference.

This study suggests areas where school officials, teachers, and parents could become more aware of and actively involved in the prevention of cyber bullying. Understanding the paths that students took in becoming an online bully helps to target areas of importance as it pertains to school policy and intervention strategies. For parents, it sheds light on the critical role they could play in preventing their children from engaging in this negative behavior.

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## DEDICATION

Any person who has ever journeyed down the road in pursuit of a Ph.D. clearly understands the time that must be committed to find success. There are also many times along the way where you consider giving up. With that in mind, I would like to dedicate this research to some very important people in my life. First, to my best friend and life partner Karen. Thank you for three years of patience and encouragement. You always understood when I needed to disappear for hours on end to write. You also always knew when I needed encouragement and went out of your way to ensure you gave me that little extra motivation I needed to stay the course. There will never be a way to articulate how thankful I am and how much I love you. To my parents, Gary and Carol Sideman, I thank you for raising me as a self-disciplined and independent woman. You have both always believed in me and my success is greatly due to your love for me as your daughter. To my little sister Amy, a big thank you for believing in me and for always celebrating my accomplishments along the way, no matter how small they were. To my nephews: Nick, Noah, and Jesse, I hope I have modeled for you the importance of learning and the only limits you have in life are those you set for yourself. And to Lindsay, thank you for continuing to challenge and humble me along this journey. All of you to whom this is dedicated, always know you are loved and my success is in many ways thanks to you.

Lastly, I want to dedicate this research to all the young adolescents out there who have ever engaged in, or fallen victim to, cyber bullying. For those of you who bully

online, you do so by choice, and it is never too late to stop. For those of you who are victims of cyber bullying, know you are special and the only one who can defeat you is you. Stay strong.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pursuing my Doctor of Philosophy has proven to be a challenging yet rewarding experience. Along the way I learned a great deal about my character, the intricacies of research, and the topic of cyber bullying.

This accomplishment would never have been possible without the support, feedback, and encouragement of many individuals. I would like to thank my dissertation committee: Dr. Jianping Shen, my chair, Dr. Sue Poppink, and Dr. Scott Palczewski. Your support and encouragement were certainly a critical element of my success. I would also like to extend my appreciation to all of the professors I encountered at WMU. Your intellect, commitment to education, and challenging courses provided me the motivation and skills needed to successfully complete my degree. I also want to extend a sincere thank you to Diane Bourgeois for assisting me with all of the required paperwork and timelines. You never hesitated to help and always responded to my requests as if I was the only student in the program. Lastly, to Dr. Mary Leiker, my former superintendent, I send a special thank you for planting the seed to pursue this degree. Without your push I likely would have never started this endeavor.

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Michele L. Siderman



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Adolescence can prove to be a difficult time period for many youth. It is during this time that they push for independence from parents while, at the same time, they are trying to figure out who they are and what they stand for. Peers begin to play a bigger role in their lives, and in most cases that can be a very positive experience. On the negative side, however, many youth encounter antisocial behaviors. Today, a new form of antisocial behavior has begun to face adolescents—cyber bullying. This study examines the writings and personal stories conveyed by first year high school students regarding their experiences with cyber bullying to gain insight into how students who never engaged in face-to-face bullying activity become involved in bullying behavior online.

### **Background**

The background for this study includes a brief discussion about adolescent social development, the increase in technology available to adolescents, the proliferation of social networking sites, and the changing landscape of traditional and cyber bullying.

### **Adolescent Development**

The developmental phase called adolescence was identified by theorists at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Petersen, 1988). According to Erik Erikson, it is during

this period of time where adolescents are attempting to figure out who they are, what they are about, and where they are going in life. Early adolescence brings about social challenges such as navigating a new and larger peer system, adapting to the changing criteria for popularity, and dealing with bullying (Shin & Ryan, 2012). Today's youth maneuver through these and other social challenges with varying degrees of difficulty (Petersen, 1988). Around eighth and ninth grade, conformity to peers, and especially to any antisocial standards established by peers, peaks. This is the point at which pressures to become independent are strongest (Berndt, 1979). With this in mind, one antisocial behavior that many youth experience is bullying, whether as the perpetrator or the victim. What makes this behavior even more challenging is the new venue for bullying provided by the internet and all of the social networking sites available to young people, resulting in the newest form of bullying—cyber bullying. An increasing number of youth embrace computer communication to meet their social needs, and at the same time, violence related to the Internet is beginning to occur more often (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007).

### **Increase of Technology for Adolescents**

It is estimated that in the United States, 45 million children between the ages of 10 and 17 use the Internet every day (Williams & Guerra, 2007). America Online (AOL), an Internet service provider which serves as a small part of web activity, reports that members join in on more than 16,000 chat sessions and send more than 2.1 billion instant messages per day (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). They add that more than 150 million individuals, including half of the youth between ages 12 and 17, own cell phones and 43% of those currently using text messaging are between the ages of 12 and 17. The

number of adolescents owning cell phones as of 2009 has increased to 75% (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickhur, 2010). In the United States, 90% of teenagers and young adults participate in one or more online communities (Trusov, Bodapati & Bucklin, 2010). Cassidy, Jackson and Brown (2009) found that 64% of adolescents access the Internet every day, while 23% access it three to five times per week.

Studies are confirming that adolescents are using the Internet for various reasons such as education, shopping, and gaming; however, social communication is the primary function among youth (Werner, Bumpus & Rock, 2010). Additionally Werner, Bumpus and Rock (2010) report that, of the 55% of adolescent Internet users that visit social networking sites, 26% do so daily. These statistics clearly indicate that there is a fairly new and highly complex social environment available for our youth. Computers offer new ways to promote social involvement, psychosocial adjustment, and academic achievement (Schoffstall & Cohen, 2011). Historian Howard Segal suggests that all technological developments are mixed blessings, presenting us with tremendous benefits, as well as unexpected burdens (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). This leads to a discussion regarding what can be one of the tremendous benefits or burdens of the Internet—social networking sites.

### **Proliferation of Social Networking Sites**

Facebook, Instagram, Ning, MySpace, YouTube, and Twitter are just a few of the many current social networking sites that have been on the rise since 2003 (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Social networks are defined as web-based services that allow users to do three things: 1) construct a public or semi-public profile, 2) articulate a list of users with

whom they wish to connect, and 3) view and/or explore their list of connections they have made within the system (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Adolescents are now using these sites in large numbers with statistics from 2009 showing 73% of teens are using social networking sites, an increase of 18% from three years prior (Lenhart et al., 2010). Lenhart et al. goes on to report that four out of every five adolescents, ages 14–17 are participating on social networks daily.

Adolescents today are a very unique population in that they are among the first that have grown up entirely surrounded by these communication technologies (Ahn, 2011a,b). The first site was developed in 1997 (boyd & Ellison, 2008), which would make the adolescent 16 years of age today. Facebook, which went public to everyone in 2006, had a total of 175 million users as of 2009, which is over twice the population of Germany (80 million). Because of the popularity with adolescents, the term “Facebook addict” has been added to the Urban Dictionary (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The popularity of this new adolescent communication tool has created some new challenges as well as some negative adolescent behavior.

### **Changing Landscape of Traditional and Cyber Bullying**

Bullying is often defined as repeated aggressive behavior in which there is an imbalance of power between parties. Traditional bullying has typically included physical acts of harassment, such as hitting and shoving; verbal abuse, such as name calling; and also subtle indirect actions like social exclusion and rumor spreading (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Although traditional bullying still exists, especially in elementary schools, middle schools and high schools are now facing the proliferation of electronic

communications and technologies which has brought young people a new means of bullying—cyber bullying. This can be extraordinarily damaging because it can now intrude into the youth's home, which previously served as the safe place from these types of attacks. While technology in schools provides endless opportunities for learning, it has also become a vehicle for cyber bullying.

A 2000 survey conducted in New Hampshire found that approximately 6% of youth had the experience of being harassed online (Li, 2007). Li found that half of adolescents report experiencing bullying, and one fourth of them experienced it online. This has been seen in the form of text-based name calling, use of very harsh language, profanity, and personal attacks. In an analysis of multiple studies on cyber bullying, Tokunaga (2010) reported that the range of victimization can be from as little as 10% to as much as 40%, depending on the study's parameters. These numbers have the potential to rise as technology continues to grow and becomes more accessible to our youth.

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) is the primary federal entity mandated by the United States Congress to collect, analyze, and report data related to education in the United States. Just recently, the NCES has begun to address the issue of cyber bullying. Students were asked for the first time in 2007 if another student posted hurtful information about the respondent on the Internet, made unwanted contact by threatening or insulting the respondent via instant messaging, or if there were unwanted contact by threatening or insult via text messaging. In 2007, 3.7% of students age 12–18 reported being victims of cyber bullying, which equates to approximately 940,000 students (Devoe & Murphy, 2011). Results from the 2007 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey also indicated that higher percentages of

students who reported being the victim of any crime at school also reported they were targets of traditional bullying (62.2%) versus non victims (30.4%) and 11.6% of crime victims were targets of electronic bullying compared to 3.3% of non- victims (Devoe & Bauer, 2010).

In 2011, the NCES reported on the 2009–2010 school data. In this School Survey on Crime and Safety, the questionnaire included an item on cyber bullying in public schools. Public schools were asked to report the occurrence of cyber bullying among students at school and away from school. Overall, 8% of public schools reported that cyber bullying had occurred among students daily or at least once per week at or away from school. Four percent of those reported that the school environment was affected by cyber bullying and that staff resources were used to deal with cyber bullying (Robers, Zhang & Truman, 2012). Robers et al. disaggregated the data further, indicating that elementary schools showed lower percentages of cyber bullying (2%) compared to their middle and high school counterparts. At the middle school level, 19% reported cyber bullying where 10% indicated it affected the school environment and 8% used staff resources to address the issue. Eighteen percent of high schools reported cyber bullying with 10% indicating it affected the school environment and 9% using staff resources. A comparative look at the reports indicates that traditional bullying is on the decline from 32% reported in 2007 to 28% in 2009. However, in that same time period, cyber bullying has almost doubled from 3.7% in 2007 to 6% in 2009.

According to Hoff and Mitchell (2009), cyber bullying is often deliberate and relentless and can be even more unnerving to students because of the anonymous nature of the assault. Cyber bullies can hide their identity and these types of attacks can be even

more psychologically vicious by using things such as sexual pictures, bash boards (websites that invite others to contribute to hateful and malicious remarks), and creating text wars. In 2006, Aftab suggested that there are two types of cyber bullying: (1) direct, which refers to messages transmitted directly from the bully to the victim, and (2) by proxy, which is using others to participate in the bully act, for example, *liking* someone else's negative post on Facebook. Alarmingly, Wong-Lo and Bullock (2011) report that 30% of onlookers (bystanders) actually support the cyber bully instead of the victim. Essentially, this virus called cyber bullying has the potential to spread at incredibly fast and large rates.

The unique, difficult, and ever changing features of technology bring about continual changes in cyber bullying which poses numerous challenges for school leaders. To support appropriate use of technology in schools, teachers and administrators must be knowledgeable about the extent and various forms of cyber bullying. Clearly, school officials and teachers cannot supervise students outside of school hours; nonetheless, for the protection of students, educators have traditionally been held to higher legal standards (Shariff, 2004).

### **Problem Statement**

Creswell (2007) suggests it is important to hear from the author the need for the study. In other words, it is a clear rationale as to why this problem needs to be studied. In this section I will explain both the practical problem and the researchable problem as it relates to this study.

## **Practical Problem Statement**

Schools are being challenged to incorporate more and more technology in classrooms. This increasing use of technology can increase students' social interactions and enhance collaborative learning and, in fact, technology can have positive effects on learning (Li, 2005). Li also suggests that the introduction of technology also brings problems that deserve our attention, including cyber bullying. The nature of new technology makes it possible for cyber bullying to occur more secretly and to spread more rapidly. Cyber bullying can affect a student's ability to learn at school (Sharif & Strong-Wilson, 2005 and Hoff & Mitchell, 2009), could have a negative effect on adolescent development (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006) and victims experience a range of emotional effects (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).

Cyber bullying and its impacts is not something that educators can ignore; yet, there are questions of jurisdiction when the bullying is initiated off school grounds. Hinduja and Patchin (2011) reported there have recently been legal cases which decisions have tended to undermine the disciplinary action taken by school districts. This has caused some hesitancy for schools to get involved in cases of cyber bullying which occurs off school grounds. They also add, however, their restrictive response is probably within the boundaries of the law if they can prove the cyber bullying has disrupted learning, interfered with the educational process, has occurred on school owned technology, or threatened other students which infringed on their civil rights.

The reality for schools is they will need to create policies, and even more important, interventions, to address the issue of cyber bullying. As of now, they will be doing so with little to no knowledge of the perpetrator's perspective. Gaining perspective



about the pathway an adolescent takes in becoming a cyber bully will be extremely helpful for various individuals. Secondary administrators may be able to use this information to make more informed decisions on policies and prevention initiatives; teachers and guidance counselors will be more equipped to intervene and assist their students in coping with the phenomena; and parents will be better informed on what to look for in respect to parenting their sons/daughters in cyberspace. The scarcity of information on the cyber bully, and the pathway of becoming one (when having never bullied in the traditional sense), is regrettable because it is the sort of evidence school leaders will need if they are to successfully implement both prevention programs and policies to address this ever growing problem.

### **Research Literature Problem Statement**

There is limited research literature available on the issue of cyber bullying. The research that has been conducted has primarily used quantitative methods and presented us with demographic statistics, frequencies, and the impact on the victims (Devoe & Bauer, 2010; Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). For example, a research study conducted by Kowalski and Limber (2005) amongst 3,767 middle school students from the Southwest and Southeastern United States found that 18% of students had reported being cyber bullied. Chibbaro (2007) reported 48% of students bullied did not know the identity of the bully.

As Patchin and Hinduja (2006) indicated in their research, “it is important to discover whether cyber bullies are simply traditional bullies who have embraced new technologies to accomplish their intentions or if they are youth who have never

participated in traditional, school-based bullying” (p. 163). According to Patchin and Hinduja (2010c) no study has yet attempted to identify the causes and correlates of cyber bullying. This study will contribute to the knowledge base by exploring the pathway and influences young people encounter when becoming a bully online via social networking sites.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to capture the voices of ninth grade students who have never engaged in traditional face to face bullying, but have cyber bullied. This study focuses on students in one school setting who have never bullied in the traditional sense but have engaged in bullying online. The study examines both the pathway and experiences behind the bullying. It will specifically look to identify influences on the students’ choice to bully. The uniqueness of this study is I, as the researcher, will examine and analyze student artifacts from a unit on cyber bullying which is covered as a regular part of the school curriculum. I worked with the instructors of the curriculum unit to include activities that engage students in reflecting on their experiences with both traditional and cyber bullying. These activities prompt students who have engaged in cyber bullying, but never engaged in traditional bullying to explain the pathway that led them to become involved in this form of bullying and how they feel about their engagement with this behavior. These responses are captured in class artifacts that the students create. This study will collect the artifacts from students who self-identify as having been involved in cyber bullying but not traditional bullying which address the study research questions.

## **Research Questions**

The overarching question that will guide my research is: What do students reveal about their path to becoming a cyber bully through artifacts completed as part of an instructional program taken in ninth grade? In addition to this question I have developed four sub questions:

1. How do students understand the difference between traditional bullying and cyber bullying?
2. How do students understand the pathway that led them to become a cyber bully?
3. How do they experience being a cyber bully and how do they feel about being involved with this behavior?
4. How does the student view the victim receiving the online bullying?

These questions will allow me, as the researcher, to gain an understanding of what makes a cyber bully and to attempt to explain the commonalities that these young people share in this position. The questions will provide a general framework, but will not limit or exclude other pertinent information collected by the data.

## **Significance**

This study will provide secondary school administrators and staff, increasingly challenged by the frequency and impact of cyber bullying, with a better understanding of the cyber bully. Cyber bullying affects a meaningful number of students every year and by extension the educators and administrators who care for them in the school environment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). The negative outcomes that victims of cyber

bullying experience compels educators to restrict and discipline online speech that undermines the educational institutional goals and missions of public schools or that infringes upon the rights of other students. This study will assist educators in that it will help provide an understanding of the cyber bully and could potentially help in the development of school policies as well as intervention and prevention programs for students.

### **Methods Overview**

This qualitative analysis of artifacts will use a phenomenological design. The focus of the study will be to describe what all the participants have in common as they transition from never bullying traditionally to becoming a cyber bully through the vehicle of social networking sites. I will be looking to determine the pathway the student experienced in becoming a cyber bully; specifically how the student experiences cyber bullying; the students' understanding of the difference between traditional and cyber bullying; and how cyber bullies view their victims receiving the bullying. The participants in this study will be ninth grade students from one school located in the state of Michigan. This school was specifically selected due to the direct attention given to the topic of cyber bullying in a curriculum taught to all ninth grade students. All ninth grade students participate in the lessons and complete a variety of activities, such as journal writings, a six paragraph paper and an online photo story.

The phenomenological design was selected because this approach allows the researcher to explore, describe, and/or analyze a person's lived experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As Creswell (2007) indicates, the phenomenological approach attempts

to get at the essence of what the participants are experiencing and to seek a more thorough understanding of the feelings and behaviors the participants' share. Through the artifacts obtained from the class where the bullying lesson occurs, I will analyze the data by reducing the information to significant statements, combining them into themes, developing a textural description (what the students experienced) and a structural description (how they experienced the phenomenon), allowing me the opportunity to convey the overall essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Conceptual Framework**

My conceptual framework explains my assumption of how an adolescent who has never engaged in traditional face to face bullying becomes a cyber bully. The box at the top represents the fact that all adolescents go through a period of social development. Depending on their experience, one direct result of that transitional period could be that the adolescent becomes a traditional bully, represented by the next box. Recently, however, there has been a fast and furious increase in technology available to this age group and part of that includes the proliferation of social media, both represented by the next two boxes on the framework. The circles represent the two types of bullies: traditional and cyber. The arrows indicate that an adolescent can be a traditional bully and may also then bully via cyberspace, where another option is that a cyber bully may develop when never having bullied traditionally. My framework takes the latter a step further by suggesting that access, anonymity, and peer relations, are potential influences in creating a cyber bully. The theoretical framework for the study is the General Strain Theory which is represented by the box to the left of the cyber bully. The bottom box

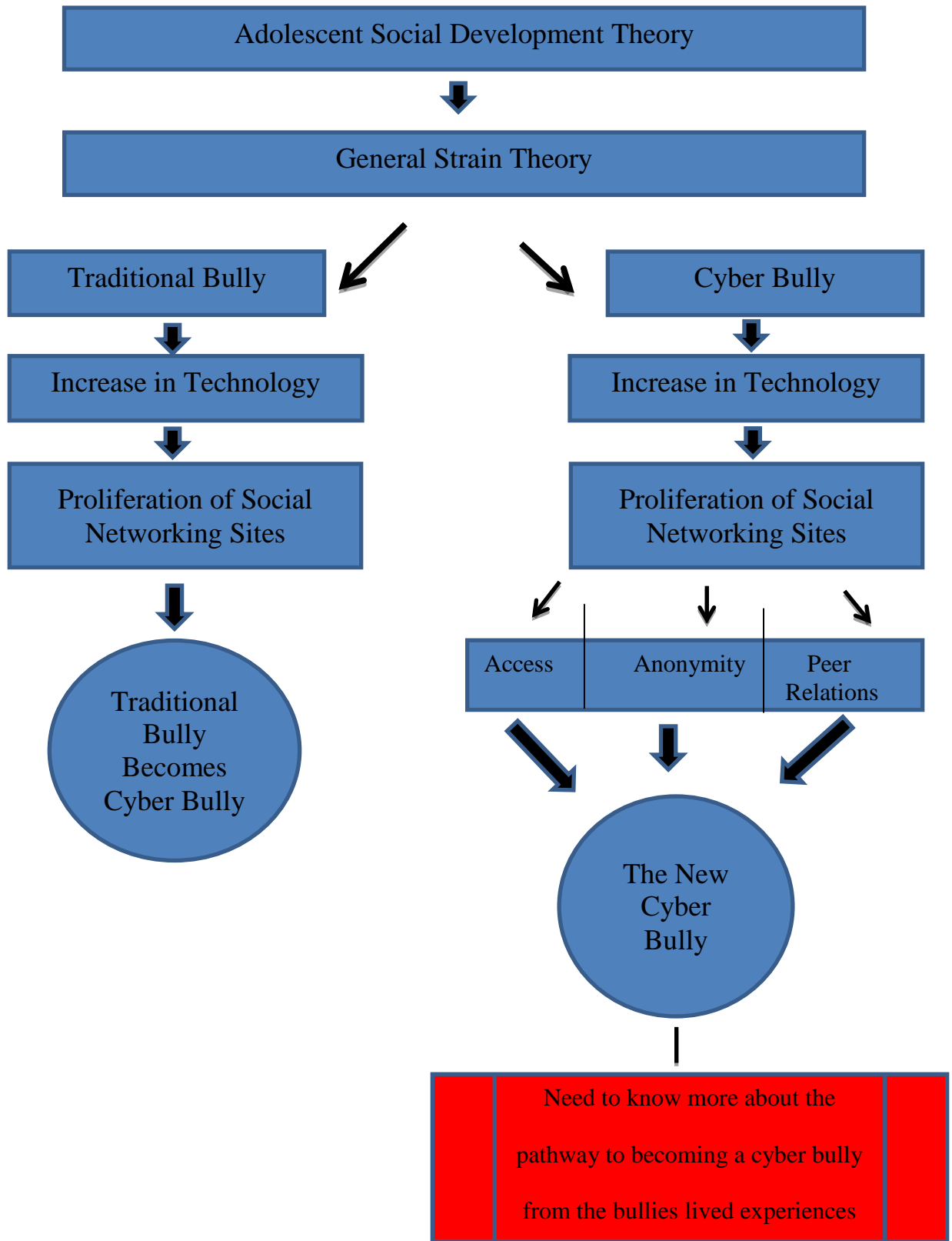


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Sideman's (2013) Study.

highlights the focus of this research study: analyzing the pathway these cyber bullies take by studying their lived experiences.

### **Access**

Technology is so prevalent in the lives of youth, leading to the assumption that cyber bullies' access to their victims is far greater than in the past. With the opportunity literally at their fingertips, via computer or phone, the choice to engage in acts of cyber bullying is more enticing. Most adolescents connect to the Internet at home, leading to online bullying that is invasive, hounding a victim even when not at or around school. The bullying attack can occur with more ease because it is not constrained by the physical location of either (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). The last decade has seen significant changes in online activity and many peer relations, both good and bad, are moving online (Jones, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2013). Online behavior is often an extension of social behaviors occurring in our face-to-face world, which has limitations versus the online world, which does not. Findings of the study conducted by Jones et al. (2013) also suggest that the popular social networking sites has resulted in more of an opportunity for adolescents to embarrass, harass or upset their peers.

### **Student Anonymity**

As opposed to traditional bullying, cyber bullying has a strong anonymity component. Victims may not know the source of the bullying message and the cyber bully does not see the victims' reaction. Anonymity can reduce social accountability, making it easier for users to engage in negative aggressive acts (Li, 2007). Electronic

bullies can remain virtually anonymous through applications, temporarily created accounts, and instant messaging programs making it difficult for a victim to identify the aggressor. Furthermore, this anonymity can free the bully from normative and social constraints they otherwise might adhere to face to face (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Advances in technology have emboldened bullies, giving them a sense of power and control.

Adolescent cyber bullies favor online sites, the attack mode of choice according to Hoff and Mitchell (2009). Cyber bullies do not have to see their victim's reaction to their hurtful words. Safety experts note that the remoteness of online interactions reduces the inhibitions that would otherwise restrain adolescents from engaging in this aggression (Jones, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2013). The bully avoids having to witness the effects of cyber bullying where the victim experiences emotions such as anger, powerlessness, sadness and fear (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009) again giving the bully a sense of power.

### **Peer Relations**

Adolescence is a period of identity exploration and development and new to this socialization process is the amount of time adolescents spend on the Internet (Anderson & Brown McCabe, 2012). This fact allows for an exciting and innovative space for this socialization to occur, serving both as an influence agent and context for identity development. Socialization is the time when adolescents learn to navigate their world and where they might fit in the existing social groups. Adolescence also brings about a greater likelihood to engage in risky behavior (Tymula, Belmaker, Roy, Ruderman, Manson, Glimcher & Levy, 2012). Witvliet, Olthof, Hoeksma, Goosens, Smits and Koot



(2010) suggest adolescents may use bullying as an inclusion technique to get in the favor of others who are considered peer leaders. Research has also shown a relationship between bullying and victimization with peer acceptance (deBruyn, Cillessen, & Wissink, 2009).

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical foundation for this study is the General Strain Theory (GST). This theory, expanded by Robert Agnew in 1992, has the potential to explain a broad range of adolescent delinquency. GST was originally presented by Robert Merton in 1938, updated in 1955 by Ronald Cohen and updated one last time prior to Agnew in 1960, this time by Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin. The first three versions of GST focused primarily on the individual and his own immediate social environment, where Agnew broadened the focus of the theory by including relationships where others present the individual with toxic and/or negative stimuli leading to adolescent crime or delinquency (Agnew, 1992). As this theory has developed, it has been tested by several empirical researchers, most recently by researchers linking the theory to the act of cyber bullying. Patchin and Hinduja (2006) identified a clear and direct relationship between strain and both types of bullying, traditional and cyber, in their research, a concept also supported by the research of Moon, Hwang & McCluskey (2008). This new line of research is limited and it is clear further studies are needed to determine how it truly stands up to cyber bullying.

## **Summary**

While email and instant messaging have been the mediums through which interpersonal communication among youth online have historically occurred; lately this type of communication has been built into social networking sites. This allows users to create personal profile pages and then link to others, for example on social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). On these sites individuals can quickly immerse their created virtual presence among those created by their entire social group and can immediately and conveniently get in contact with one another. Hinduja and Patchin (2007) suggest that this changes youths' interactions from dyadic to interpersonal relationships occurring within a context of many others. With this comes the concern that the impact of cyber bullying and its reaches can be astronomical, as compared to the impact traditional bullying has had on its victims. Patchin and Hinduja (2010c) suggest that no study has yet attempted to identify the causes and correlates of cyber bullying. The intent of my research is to get at the process adolescent experiences in becoming a cyber bully from the voice of the cyber bully him or herself.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the literature review is to synthesize the literature on cyber bullying and establish justification for the study. The review of literature focuses on four aspects important to the study. The first section takes a step back and explores adolescent social development and aggression helping to bring into context what adolescents experience during this period in life. The second section defines and explores bullying, both traditionally and via cyberspace, and the impacts on victims. The next section focuses on the theory underlying this study, General Strain Theory, and how it has been tested against the antisocial behavior of cyber bullying. The last section focuses on the other possible influences on adolescents when deciding to bully online via social networking sites. The review of the literature builds a framework for this study using current research and supports my conceptual framework shared in Chapter One.

#### **Adolescent Social Development**

This section will explore adolescent social development, both historically and in terms of changes with the invention of the Internet. There will also be particular attention given to adolescent aggression in both the physical and cyber sense.

## **Historical Perspective**

Adolescence as a period of developmental growth did not really evolve until the early 1900s. Hall's study in 1904 is most often credited as being the first to identify adolescence as an important period in life (Petersen, 1988). His view focused on this time period as being one of storm and stress and his philosophy was amplified by others such as Lewin (in 1939) and Freud (in 1958) throughout the next 50 years. The views on adolescent development began to change during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, including Piaget's work on cognitive development in the late 1950s and then Erikson's stages of development where adolescence was a time period where teens development of identity was central (Petersen, 1988).

The late 20<sup>th</sup> century to present has researchers looking at the adolescent period as a more process oriented time which involves relationships with others. One example of this is the increased conformity to peers and the decreased conformity to parents. It is a period where youth are increasingly relying on their friends for support and companionship and when their attention to their social reputation and popularity amongst their social groups increase (Shin & Ryan, 2012). Berndt (1979) conducted two studies of students grades three, six, nine, and 11/12, the first with 251 students the second with 273 students. He reported the results of both studies indicated peer conformity in respect to anti-social behavior was at its peak in ninth grade while conformity to parents was steadily decreasing with age. This finding informs my study in that my study will aim to capture the voices of ninth grade students, specifically around the anti-social behavior of cyber bullying.

## **Adolescent Social Development with the Internet**

The newest challenge for adolescents and their development is the Internet. The ever increasing number of adolescents participating on social networking sites suggests that these online communities mediate a wide range of peer social practices (Ahn, 2011a). Social networking is defined by Merchant (2012) as “patterning or flow of communication and interaction by drawing attention to relationships, social groupings, friendship, intra- and inter-group behaviors as they are enacted in and across different geographical locations over time” (p. 9). In other words, adolescents are beginning to make decisions on what to disclose about themselves, real or not, to others via the Internet (Ahn, 2011b). This process of developing identity, as mentioned earlier, is a key component of adolescence; researchers on social networking sites suggest that these online communities can actually help teens build social capita (Ahn, 2011b).

Valkenburg and Peter (2009) reported that longer use of the Internet and social networking sites actually led to increased feelings of depression and loneliness as it begins to isolate adolescents from their friends in face to face social settings. As the boundary between the online and offline worlds become increasingly intertwined, adolescents may begin to ask themselves where their friends really are—on their friend list on their social networking site or at school (Merchant, 2012). The true effect social networking sites have on adolescent social development is yet to be seen.

Whether looking at adolescent social development historically or currently, peer conformity and an increased focus on popularity remains a critical element of adolescence. One of the negative impacts is that teens tend to conform to anti-social behaviors and one example of that is aggression. This study will look for clues about the

role that social networking plays in sponsoring bullying activity within the narratives and other class artifacts created by students as they examine their own experiences with cyber bullying.

### **Adolescent Aggression and Cyber Aggression**

Adolescence is a stage where negative behaviors, including aggression, emerge for many youth (Farrell, Bettencourt, Mays, Kramer, Sullivan & Kliewer, 2012).

“Aggressive behavior is determined by a complex interaction of social, cognitive, emotional, and biological factors” (Goldstein & Tisak, 2010, p. 471). Aggression is used to gain or maintain status amongst peers and might be acted out through physical contact, gossiping, harassment or exclusion (Faris, 2012). Studies have shown that students who endorse aggressive beliefs are more likely to engage in violent behaviors (Wang, Chen, Xiao, Ma and Zhang, 2012). Henry, Farrell, Schoeny, Tolan and Dymnicki (2011) suggested that this adolescent aggressive behavior is affected by shared norms about aggression amongst peer groups and that being in highly aggressive places (such as school), places students at risk of future aggressive behaviors. Aggression is found to also increase for adolescents who affiliate with anti-social peers in a group (Shi & Xie, 2012). This supports my conceptual framework in that I suggest peer relations play a role in an adolescent becoming a cyber bully when never having bullied in the traditional face-to-face form. As I examine the student artifacts collected for this study, I will pay attention to how these peer relations form and norms of aggressiveness emerge in that environment.

Normative beliefs in adolescents are their own cognitions about the acceptability or unacceptability about behavior (Ang, Tan & Mansor, 2010). Ang et al. continue to suggest these cognitions serve to regulate actions by prescribing the range of permitted and/or prohibited behaviors. Adolescents who approve the normative beliefs about aggression view bullying, and the use of other types of aggressive behaviors, as acceptable. Williams and Guerra (2007) found that an increase in one unit of the normative belief scale used in their study led to a 24% increase in the odds of cyber bullying.

There are two types of adolescent aggression: reactive and proactive. Reactive aggression is an impulsive retaliatory action marked with hostile intents (Sontag, Clemans, Graber & Lyndon, 2011). This type of aggression tends to emerge in face to face encounters, as in traditional bullying. Proactive aggression, the second type of aggression, consists of deliberate and planned behavior (Calvete, Orue, Estevez, Villardon & Padilla, 2010). They suggested cyber bullying is related to proactive aggression which is carried out in a cold manner in order to achieve some goal.

In recent years, there are new forms of aggression based on technological communication. This type of communication, which is occurring more frequently, has added to the traditional forms of adolescent violence (Calvete et al., 2010). Scholars are in agreement that higher levels of interpersonal misunderstandings and aggression are more likely to occur in interactions via the computer (Ang et al., 2010). Ang et al. (2010) adds that with the insufficient social cues available in cyberspace, the potential is present for adolescents to develop a blatant disregard for others. These insufficient social clues relate to the anonymity that my conceptual framework represents as an influence in an

adolescent becoming a cyber bully. Cyber aggression is intentional harmful behavior that provides adolescents with a number of advantages; it can occur anytime, spread quickly, and it can occur outside of school property making it difficult for adults to monitor and regulate (Sontag et al., 2011). As such, cyber aggression poses a new and unique threat to youth. What is not clear is how conscious young cyber bullies are about the aggressiveness of their actions and the potential threat to their victims.

## **Bullying**

Bullying has long been a concern among parents, educators, and students (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010c). Research consistently shows a significant number of elementary school aged children are involved in traditional bullying. Specifically, up to 45% of students engage as a bully where as many as 60% of elementary students report being victims of such behavior (Duffy & Nesdale, 2009). Bullying has now begun to take on a new face. Because of the growth in technological advances, the bullying has transformed from the physical to the virtual (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). By age ten, youth are more likely to use the Internet than adults, and research indicates 91% of youth ages 12 to 15 and 99% of youth ages 16 to 18 use the Internet (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011). To gain a better understanding of both types of bullying, I will take a closer look at them separately.

### **Traditional Bullying**

School bullying is a global phenomenon that has been studied extensively, internationally and culturally, and has proven to have had damaging psychological and



physical effects on both the victims and the bullies alike (Moon, Hwang & McCluskey, 2008). Traditional bullying is typically defined as repeated aggressive behavior in which there is an imbalance of power (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Li, 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Shariff, 2004). Nansel et al. (2001) interviewed 15,686 students in grades six through ten and identified that approximately 11% were yearly victims of bullying, while 6% reported being a victim and bully both. These numbers are in line with estimates that 30% of American youth are involved in bullying at any one point in time.

Traditional bullying is separated into two types: overt and covert. Overt bullying is considered physical aggression such as beating, kicking, shoving, and/or sexual touching, whereas covert bullying is the exclusion from peer groups, stalking, staring, gossiping, and/or verbal threats (Shariff, 2004). Whether overt or covert, the generally accepted intention of the bully is to hurt another individual or group of individuals (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011). Bullying often occurs among youth in school hallways, bathrooms, playgrounds, and can extend to other venues such as malls, restaurants or within neighborhoods (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Li (2007) suggests that much of school violence during adolescence involves bullying peers and found that over half of the students reported being bullied in school. The first stage of bullying is generally equated to harassment, but, over time, becomes better equated to violence (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; 2010c). A great deal of aggression in schools involves bullying (Witvliet, Olthof, Hoeksma, Goosens, Smits & Koot, 2010). It is not clear; however, how much of this aggression is actually motivated by a conscious intention to do harm.

Studies have found that traditional bullying is related to anger, depression, low empathy, low family cohesion, low parental monitoring, low self-esteem, emotional

instability, and delinquency (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010a). A popular bully may be described as a child who is at the center of a group in terms of attention, attraction, and/or dominance who is often involved in aggression (deBruyn, Cillessen, & Wissink, 2009). Bullies tend to face multiple mental health problems and may face concurrent challenges such as alcohol, substance abuse, depression, and aggressive behavior (Williams & Guerra, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007). They add that over the long run, bullies are more likely to manifest anti-social behaviors.

Patchin and Hinduja (2006) suggest that bullies have characteristics of popularity, physical strength, social competence, quick wit, extroversion, confidence, intelligence, and that their socio-economic status is also influential. By contrast, Peeters, Cillessen, and Scholte (2010) said it is critical to differentiate between bullies. Some may be socially intelligent and possess the ability to manipulate their peers. Some do not possess those qualities and in fact may not be well accepted by their peers. Scholte, Engels, Overbeek, deKemp and Haselager (2007) pick up on the latter argument and go on to suggest that bullies are more rejected and less popular and display more anti-social, aggressive, and disruptive behavior. They further suggest that the social environment may actually work to reinforce the bullies' behaviors because peers often do not intervene. Bullies may perceive this lack of intervention as a signal that peers condone the bullying. Even more encouraging to bullying behavior, peers may actually actively reinforce bullies by encouraging them through cheering and laughing. Thus, peer reactions to bullying aggressors may make them more likely to engage in anti-social activities later in life. Approximately 60% of those characterized as bullies in grades six through nine were convicted of at least one crime by age 24 compared to 23% who were

not characterized as a bully or victim. Both bullies and their victims are at an increased risk for developmental problems that can continue into adulthood (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

Many bullies tend to be members of the same peer group where the behavior constitutes the norm and the individuals who hold the most central position in the group tend to engage in the most aggressive bullying behavior (Duffy & Nesdale, 2009; Witvliet et al., 2010). Witvliet et al. (2010) conducted a study which showed members of peer groups with younger children display more physical bullying than members of peer groups with older children. Their findings indicate this to be the case because pre-adolescent physical bullying becomes a less effective strategy when attempting to achieve or maintain a position in their perceived popular peer group.

Bullying face to face is a school problem and victims tend to report significantly fewer positive relationships with their peers (Ybarra, Deiner-West & Leaf, 2007). Where many young people are able to shrug off being bullied because of peer or family support, others are unable to cope. Those unable to deal with being bullied, often suffer from possible suicidal ideation, eating disorders, and/or chronic illnesses (Hay & Meldrum, 2009; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Wong-Lo and Bullock (2011) indicate that victims suffer prolonged emotional or behavioral difficulties both prior to and during the course of the bullying behavior. Specifically, victims report feelings of depression, low self-esteem, helplessness, social anxiety and alienation.

It is well documented, through years of research, what contributes to a young person becoming a traditional bully. These young people who begin bullying face-to-face at a young age will likely transfer to online bullying as they become more exposed to

the Internet. Since what makes these young people tick is so well studied I am choosing a different route for my study. I will specifically look at adolescents who have never bullied face-to-face but have bullied online via social networking sites. There is limited research on this group of young people and if their pathway in becoming a bully is due to similar or very different reasons.

### **The Adolescent and Technology**

It is estimated that 45 million youth ages ten to 17 use the Internet everyday (Williams & Guerra, 2007) and 20 million youth between the ages of two and 17 logged into the Internet in July 2002, 11.5 million using instant messaging programs. America Online, a popular Internet home search page, reported in 2003 more than 2.1 billion instant messages were sent daily and to give a point of reference that number is compared to 1.9 billion phone calls made per day at that same time (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). They continued to report that approximately 17 million or 73% of youth ages 12 to 17 uses the Internet regularly and 37% of those youth indicated that they use textual communication to say something they would not say in person, leading to the potential for harassment and negative treatment online. Adolescents have even more recently embraced online social networking sites where 82% of youth between the ages of 14 and 17 (Lenhart et al., 2010) and 55% between 12 and 13 have a social networking profile page. These sites serve as a digital representation of one's self, their interests, personal styles, likes and dislikes. Individuals then link themselves to friends who have done the same. Specifically, 83% add comments to posted pictures, 77% post public messages,

71% send private messages, 66% post comments, and 54% send instant messages (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010b).

The use of socially interactive technologies is high amongst teens (Bryant, Sanders-Jackson & Smallwood, 2006) and there are hundreds of services that cater to a vast variety of populations (Ahn, 2011a). Social networking sites are but one example of the socially interactive technologies adolescents are using at increasing rates. Merchant (2012) defined these sites as a pattern or flow of communication enacted across different geographical locations over time. Emerging research indicates these online communities mediate a wide variety of peer social practices (Ahn, 2011a).

The digital divide, which is what researchers refer to as the gaps in access to technology between various populations, has been decreasing since the early 2000s. Ahn's study in 2011 indicates that 60% of White and Black adolescents use social networking sites. Teens who reported having their primary access to technology outside of their home were 128% more likely to use social networking sites. The adolescents also reported that even though many still may not have technology at home, 94% of them in this situation are still able to find their way online to communicate with their "friends" via social networking sites.

This ever increasing use of technology, specifically the volume of adolescents participating in social networking sites, has given them quite a bit of power. Due to the use and popularity amongst teens, it has caused many of the popular sites to shift features they provide. While Facebook is still the most popular social networking site, newer sites such as Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr are gaining in popularity (Lenhart et al., 2010). Given this power, popularity and access to social networking sites, adolescents have

begun to engage in another type of negative behavior in these arenas, cyber bullying. This study will capture the voices of adolescents who engage in this behavior by examining artifacts they have completed as part of a bullying unit.

### **The New Bullying**

As teenagers increase their communication through the Internet, interpersonal conflict is bound to occur (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, bullies may use technology to inflict harm on their peers (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010c). Both cyber bullying and traditional bullying are rooted in aggression (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004) and modern technology has enabled bullies to extend their reach of aggression and threats beyond the physical to cyberspace where they can harass others day and night using the Internet (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). The Internet offers several advantages to individuals inclined to harass or bully others. Bullies can remain anonymous which frees them from normative behaviors plus it takes less energy to express hurtful comments using a keyboard (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

### **Cyber Bullying**

By definition, cyber bullying is defined as willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; 2010a, 2010c; Williams & Guerra, 2007). Like traditional bullying, it involves malicious aggressors who seek implicit or explicit pleasure or profit through the mistreatment of another. To be considered cyber bullying, the communication or harassment must be repetitive in nature (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). Cyberspace can be a graphic, scary and threatening place

with very few expectations for socially acceptable behavior (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). Hoff and Mitchell (2009) equated it to the Wild West where anything goes. Shariff (2004) suggested cyber bullying is a form of covert bullying and occurs online via the Internet. Li (2007) contends cyber bullying involves the use of information and communication through technologies such as email, cell phones, and/or websites to support deliberate repeated hostile behaviors from an individual, or group, intended to harm others. It has been assumed that cyber bullying is an extension of traditional bullying (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011) but unlike traditional bullying it can occur at any time and can be quickly distributed to a wide audience (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). The increasing number of computers in private environments, such as an adolescent's bedroom, makes it more difficult for a probing parent to discover the cyber bullying and this privacy also allows youth to contact each other at all times in almost all places (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

Cyber bullying behavior while intentional, willful, and repetitive (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; 2010a,c; Williams & Guerra, 2007) has some distinctions: (a) cyber bullies can remain virtually anonymous through use of temporary messages and pseudonyms, (b) there are not any authorities policing online behaviors and, (c) it seems much easier for youth to be cruel online because of the physical separation from their victim so socially accepted expectations are less relevant (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010a). As age increases, the likelihood of becoming a cyber bully increases (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007). Limited research suggests girls tend to cyber bully more and are cyber bully victims of such behaviors over their male counter parts (Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

Williams and Guerra (2007) concluded that Internet bullying peaks in eighth grade and decline in that behavior was seen by grade eleven.

Li (2007) reported over half of students know someone who had been cyber bullied and one out of every six students indicated they had cyber bullied a peer. This is compared to a survey conducted in 2000 in New Hampshire where only six percent of students reported experience with cyber bullying. In seven years, the phenomenon increased by close to 46% (Li, 2007). A study in 2009 reported over one fourth of youth ages 12 to 14 years old had cyber bullied and did so because they did not like the person, the other person upset them, were bullied first, their friends did it so they did it, or it was simply just fun (Cassidy, Jackson & Brown, 2009). Intimidation is quickly changing from the physical to humiliation through destructive messages, gossip, slander and other virtual threats (Williams & Guerra, 2007). Youth who can navigate the electronic world and use it in a way to harass others put themselves in a position of power relative to their victim (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Cyber bullying represents a unique phenomenon that creates lasting memories to the victims and yet we still have a lot to learn about it (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011). This study will look at the experiences of adolescents who cyber bully in attempt to learn more about the phenomenon and the pathway taken in becoming a bully through the use of social networking sites.

### **Impact of Cyber Bullying**

Online bullying can impact youth in a negative way. Almost 30% of adolescents reported they were victims of online bullying, meaning they were ignored, disrespected, called names, threatened, picked on, made fun of, or had rumors spread about them to



others (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Life in cyberspace is often intertwined with life in the real world. In other words, what happens during the day is discussed online at night and what takes place online at night is often discussed during the day, so cyber bullying as defined above spreads like wild fire at school (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Unfortunately, this topic is so new and difficult to monitor, empirical research has yet to confidently determine if online bullying results in the same types of feelings for the victims that traditional bullying creates. It is plausible that loss of self-confidence, self-esteem, depression, anger, frustration and public humiliation could definitely be possible responses to cyber bullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Sontag et al., 2011).

Since 2006, there has been some additional research that is slowly beginning to define the impact cyber bullying has on its victims. According to Wong-Lo and Bullock (2011), evidence suggests that victims of cyber bullying suffer prolonged emotional or behavioral difficulties prior to and during victimization. Victims seem to report similar feelings as victims of traditional bullying such as depression, low self-esteem, helplessness, social anxiety, and alienation. As the frequency increases, Ybarra and Mitchell (2007) report that mental health problems increase. These equate to depressive symptoms, anxiety, excessive psychosomatic symptoms and increased substance abuse. Ybarra et al. (2007) conducted a study where almost two out of every five (39%) reported emotional distress as a result. Patchin and Hinduja (2010a) reported that literature regarding cyber bullying and self-esteem consistently found victims tend to have lower self-esteem. Of youth who had been harassed online, almost one-third (32%) reported at least one symptom of stress as a result of the incident. Furthermore, 31% reported being very or extremely upset, 19% were very or extremely afraid, and 18% were very or

extremely embarrassed by the harassment (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Hoff and Mitchell (2009) reported cyber bullying is causing students to experience feelings of anger, powerlessness, fear and sadness, which are many of the same negative outcomes of traditional bullying.

In addition to the personal responses to bullying, victimization can also affect a student's ability to learn at school (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). Patchin and Hinduja (2006) suggest victims of cyber bullying may be at risk for other negative developmental and behavioral consequences, including school violence and delinquency. Ybarra et al. (2007) agree indicating school behavior problems including ditching school, bringing weapons, detentions and suspensions are significantly more frequently reported by youth harassed online.

Cyber bullying has raised concerns because its electronic nature makes it less likely to attract the attention of parents and school personnel and, moreover, victims may have a more difficult time gaining a reprieve from the cyber bully, given the fact the students can be exposed even when physically removed from the bully (Hay & Meldrum, 2009). Kowalski and Limber (2007) stated that, "the enemy we know is often less frightening than the enemy we do not know" (p. 28). Victims feel helpless because they are not equipped to handle the bullying and do not know what to do to make it stop. They generally do not seek help because of the fear of retribution or embarrassment and they assume adults will not act (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). With traditional bullying, the bystanders are usually only a handful of students, but the potential audience and involvement with bystanders online is limitless, thus compounding the problem (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). It might be argued that victims can quickly escape the

harassment by deleting messages or simply logging offline and the victim is protected from overt acts by geography (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Some victims will try to avoid the cyber bullying, but that usually does little to discourage the bully. The victims that do choose to fight back generally wait until the bullying reaches intolerable levels, then they act which becomes very dangerous for both the victim and the bully (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). Regardless, social acceptance is critically important to adolescents' identity and self-esteem and cyber bullying can possibly result in more permanent psychological, emotional and social issues (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Given the importance of social development that occurs in adolescence, the fact that older youth tend to be more involved with cyber bullying means that they may not be developing the skills necessary to succeed in life (Ybbarra & Mitchell, 2007). One theory that has looked specifically at adolescent behaviors and cyber bullying is the General Strain Theory which is explained in detail next.

### **General Strain Theory**

General Strain Theory (GST) has the potential to explain a broad range of delinquency. Agnew (1992) argued that strain theory has a central role to play in explaining crime and delinquency. GST was originally presented in 1938 by Robert Merton then updated in 1955 by Ronald Cohen and once again updated in 1960 by Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin. GST during those snapshots focused on the individuals and their own immediate social environment not how others within the environment may have affected them. As it was updated over time, it was done so with empirical researchers providing guidelines to test the theory.

Agnew's (1992) GST is different from the other theories in its specification of the types of social relationships that lead to delinquency. Agnew broadened the focus of this theory to include relationships in which others present the individual with toxic or negative stimuli. Specifically, strain is most likely to occur when (a) the adolescent is not attached to parents, school or other institutions; (b) parents and others fail to monitor and effectively sanction deviance; (c) the adolescent's actual or anticipated investment in conventional society is minimal; and (d) the adolescent has yet to internalize conventional belief.

### **Major Types of Strain**

Agnew (1985) argued that strain may result in not only the failure to achieve positively valued goals, but also the inability to escape from painful situations. There are three major types of strain: prevention of an individual from achieving positively valued goals; removal of, or the threat to remove, positively valued stimuli an individual already possesses; or the presentation of, or threat of the presentation of, toxic or negatively valued stimuli (Agnew, 1992).

**Strain as failure to achieve positively valued goals.** There are three types of strain that fall under this category. The first type of strain is the disconnection between an adolescent's aspirations and expectation with their actual achievements. This can also be stated as an adolescent's expected level of goal achievement. There is a youth subculture that emphasizes a variety of immediate goals. The achievement of these goals within this subculture depends on a variety of factors such as socio-economic status, intelligence, physical attractiveness, personality, and athletic ability. As a result,

adolescents can find it difficult to achieve their immediate goals due to the lack of these traits or skills and may use illegitimate channels to attempt to meet their expectations (Agnew, 1992).

The second type of strain under this category is the disconnection between expectations and actual achievements. This particular strain is more extrinsically based. Achievements is defined more like rewards so strain occurs when the adolescent has a level of expectation but is unable to achieve the reward. The failure to achieve such expectations may lead to emotions such as anger, rage, and disappointment all of which are typically associated with strain in the field of criminology. Due to this disconnect, it can be argued that adolescents will be strongly motivated to reduce the gap and deviance is commonly mentioned as an option to get that result (Agnew, 1992). A very simple example would be the expectation of an adolescent to earn a particular grade in a course but the student has to cheat to achieve it.

The last strain in this category is the disconnection between just/fair outcomes and the actual outcome. This particular strain assumes adolescents do not generally enter into interaction with specific outcomes, but rather enter expecting justice will be followed leading to a just and fair outcome. An example might be two adolescents entering into a relationship where their input into the relationship is equal and the outcome of the relationship will be just. If, however, the ratios of interaction are unequal, the individuals will feel the outcomes are unequal, leading to distress, which, for some will then manifest into deviant type behaviors (Agnew, 1992).

**Strain as the removal of positively valued stimuli.** The loss of positively valued stimuli may lead to delinquency when the individual attempts to prevent the loss,

retrieve the lost stimuli, obtain a substitute stimulus, seek revenge against those responsible for the loss, or simply manage the negative affect caused by the loss by engaging in some sort of substance abuse (Agnew, 1992).

**Strain as the presentation of negative stimuli.** Prior strain theories do not focus on negative stimuli. Agnew (1985) focuses on the inability of adolescents to escape legally from the negative stimuli. This negative stimulus may lead an adolescent to try to escape or avoid it, terminate or alleviate it, or seek revenge against the source of it. Aggression has been linked to negative stimuli such as, but not limited to, child abuse/neglect, criminal victimization, physical punishment, negative relations with parents and/or peers, negative school experiences, verbal threats and/or physical pain.

### **Links Between Strain and Delinquency**

Any of the strains above increases the likelihood that an adolescent will experience one or more negative emotions. These emotions include disappointment, depression, and fear but the most critical is anger. Anger increases the adolescent's level of felt injury, creates a deeper desire for revenge, and energizes the adolescent for action. Anger then becomes conducive to delinquency. Delinquency may be a method for alleviating strain, seeking revenge, or managing a negative effect. Adolescents who are subjected to strain are considered to be predisposed to delinquency because they have already attempted to deal with the strain using non delinquent strategies. The threshold for adversity may be lower by the existence of chronic strain, repeated strain may lead to a hostile attitude, and chronic strain increases the likelihood adolescents will be high in negative arousal at any given time (Bandura, 1983; Bernard, 1990).

## **General Strain Theory and its Relationship to Cyber Bullying**

GST rests on the idea that strain results from negative relationships with others. Given this idea it is easy to see how the relationship between a cyber bully and his or her victim can either be caused by strain or result in a strain inducing experience (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). Additionally, online bullying is associated with elevated levels of distress (Jovonen & Gross, 2008). Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) indicated that poor caregiver monitoring is implicated in increasing the odds an adolescent will harass another online. Cyber bullying makes sense as a response to strain when considered with the context of GST (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010c). According to Agnew (1992), experiencing strain makes people feel bad, angry, frustrated, depressed, and/or anxious. These feelings create pressure for corrective action so adolescents under strain begin to think they want to do something that will assist them in not feeling so bad and clearly bullying others is one such corrective action (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010c).

Patchin and Hinduja (2010c) found a clear, direct relationship was established between strain and both types of bullying: traditional and cyber. Bullying seemed to be related to feelings of negative emotions. In other words, adolescents in this study who revealed feeling angry and/or frustrated were more likely to have participated in bullying and cyber bullying. Several other examinations of GST have found empirical support for the theory. For example, life events, life hassles, negative relations with adults, and parental fighting were also found to be significantly and positively related to delinquent behavior (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). Another relationship linking GST and cyber bullying is the significance of social acceptance among adolescents. Adolescents

desperately seek affirmation and approval by their peers and when rejected they may seek this approval through illegitimate means, cyber bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007).

While these studies provide a significant link between GST and cyber bullying, Moon et al. (2008) found only moderate support for the applicability of GST and cyber bullying. They found that only a teacher's emotional and physical punishment and examination strain had significant effects on bullying. This study, conducted in Korea, also found that depression was positively significantly related to bullying. Adolescents were more likely to exhibit pessimistic views of themselves and others and were more likely to engage in self-destructive and aggressive behaviors towards others.

It is easy to see how cyber bullying and the victims of such behavior can be related to strain. Textual attacks by one upon another through cyberspace involve the presentation of negatively valued stimuli. This collectively underscores the fact that cyber bullying can affect an adolescent's functional and developmental stability in ways that demand attention and deeper inquiry (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). This study will attempt to answer how the various elements of GST or the theory as a whole stand up to cyber bullying and if so in what ways.

### **Other Factors Influencing Adolescents and Cyber Bullying**

In this section the influences of anonymity and peer relations will be reviewed in relation to their influences on an adolescent and his decision to become a cyber bully. These concepts have been mentioned in previous sections. However, they each deserve their own section as their influence is critical as we attempt to understand the why behind cyber bullying.



## **Anonymity**

The anonymous nature of cyberspace allows perpetrators to be shielded by screen names that protect their identity (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011). Anonymity, which is inherent to many modes of electronic communication, fosters playful distribution but also reduces social accountability, making it easier for users to engage in hostile, aggressive type acts. The anonymity essentially becomes a potential equalizer to this negative behavior (Li, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). This umbrella of anonymity increases the potential pool of adolescents whom might engage in bullying online (Kowalski, Morgan & Limber, 2012).

Kowalski and Limber (2007) comment that one of the most compelling and arguably most dangerous aspects of the Internet is the fact it allows people to maintain anonymity. This is compounded by the fact that people, adolescents in this case, cannot see the target's emotional response. The Internet lacks non-verbal cues used in traditional communication to indicate one's emotional state which some suggest can lead to more aggressive hostile behavior (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Anderson and McCabe's (2012) interpretive study with 149 eighth grade students in the southwestern United States noted that the anonymous nature of the Internet expanded their negative behavior. Examples of these behaviors included deceiving others, using aggressive language and experimenting with different identities online. The researchers also reported that the students in this study defined anonymity not as others not knowing who they were but rather that others could not see them. Cyberspace offers some degree of safety because hiding behind a computer screen frees adolescents from traditional constraints and social

pressures, as well as from moral and ethical expectations (Calvete et al., 2010).

Anonymity, in essence, allows bullies to be more hurtful and, in addition, those caught usually cannot be punished by school policy or criminal law (Li, 2007; Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011).

The effects of anonymity include the aggressor's perceived power to harass without consequence, an adolescent's ability to assume a friend's identity through use of passwords, an increased level of fear experienced by students who are threatened by an unknown identity, and a reluctance to tell adults because of a student's strong belief it is not possible to prove the identity of the bully (Mishna, Saini & Solomon, 2009). Mishna et al.'s (2009) study with fifth through eighth grade students depicted cyber bullying as anonymous. Many students stressed a large part of the power and impact of cyber bullying is a function of cyberspace where the bully is anonymous. It can be just about anyone. Some students in the study attributed this power of anonymity to individuals feeling more comfortable in their own homes with little fear of repercussions or of being traced. Adolescents believed this enabled aggressors to threaten, harass, or denigrate others and even assume a different persona online.

There is some concern amongst researchers that online harassment is expanding, in part due to the nature of the online environment. Some online safety experts report that anonymity, along with the remoteness of online social interactions reduces adolescent inhibitions which might otherwise restrain youth (Jones, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2013). Ang et al. (2010) suggest anonymity can serve to reduce self-awareness resulting in a loss of sense of individual identity which weakens an adolescents' ability to regulate their behavior and a lower likelihood to care what others

think of their behavior. Christofides, Muise and Desmarais (2012) reported that the most common bad experience on social networking sites was bullying. Of the 256 adolescents in the study, many reported they felt people made negative comments online they would otherwise not make in person due to the distance a computer provides. They also shared, as part of the study, the online social networking site Facebook actually has an application that can be downloaded called Honesty Box which allows students to specifically send and receive anonymous messages.

The question remains whether the Internet and cyber bullying are really anonymous. Jovonen and Gross (2008) reported 73% of respondents were either pretty sure or totally sure of who was bullying them. In another study conducted by them a year previously, only half of the victims knew the perpetrator. Mishna et al. (2009) found similar results in that 73% of cyber bully victims knew who the bully was, only 25% did not. They reminded us in their study that cyber bullying most often occurs within the context of their own social group. Hinduja and Patchin (2007) looked specifically at adolescent online behaviors and reported that 40% of their interaction on social media websites was limited to private access, meaning only those approved as friends could interact with them. Anonymity also has a reported upside. The Internet equalizes the playing field where those who may feel socially marginalized are able to communicate and find social support and acceptance online (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004).

The research has some contradicting findings in whether or not anonymity exists online for adolescents and whether or not it has an impact on adolescents' behavior and choices online. My conceptual framework suggests that anonymity does play a role in an adolescent choosing to bully online via social networking sites. Whether that anonymity

is defined as hiding one's own identity or defined as not seeing the victim of the harmful words is yet to be determined. Through the analysis of student artifacts this study will attempt to answer how and in what way anonymity impacts an adolescent's choice to cyber bully.

## **Peer Relations**

Early adolescence is a critical transition period and increasing peer influence, a large part of this transition, has the potential to put adolescents at a higher risk for violence perpetration and victimization (Henry et al., 2011). Developmental psychologists and sociologists have acknowledged the important role peer groups play in shaping and supporting members' behavior (Shi & Xie, 2012). Peers assume a primary role during this time and peer group status begins to replace parents as a source of identification (Davis, 2010). It is during this time that peer interactions arguably hold the greatest importance for individuals' social and behavioral functioning (Mikami, Szewedo, Allen, Evans & Hare, 2010). This, for many adolescents, can be a source of vulnerability when relying on peers for self-validation (Davis, 2010).

Peer relationships are important markers for later development including anti-social behavior and peer rejection occupies a critical place in the developmental process. Peer rejection is a life event that may be stressful emerging from the desire of the individual to be part of a larger group. This is consistent with GST by Agnew. Peers may be able to sense rejection which serves as a trigger which pushes the individual into delinquent behavior. How an adolescent is able to navigate this strain determines prominence or rejection in peer groups (Higgins, Piquero & Piquero, 2010). Peer

rejection is a social process that has often been considered relevant to the understanding of aggressive adolescents who bully. These adolescents tend to not be liked and rejected by their peers because they may be isolated from the socially non-aggressive peer groups. Their rejected social status then provides them a reason to affiliate with other rejected peers (Witvliet et al., 2010).

Witvliet et al. (2010) found that peer groups that are perceived as highly popular and low in likability tend to show a large amount of bullying, whereas groups low in perceived popularity who are highly liked tend to show little bullying behaviors. They go on to suggest that adolescents may use bullying as an inclusion technique to get into favor with the leaders of the high status peer groups and at the same time members of perceived popular groups may use bullying to exclude other adolescents in lower status standing. High status in a peer group is not always associated with positive qualities. Aggressive behaviors, such as bullying, appear to be associated with high levels of perceived popularity and in low levels of acceptance. Clemans, Graber and Bettencourt (2012) suggest that placing socially authoritative peers in high regard may foster negative social behavior. High status peers were found to have a greater influence on early adolescents' aggression. They are also more likely to influence low status members versus other high status members (Shi & Xie, 2012). Low status is more associated with victimization (deBruyn et al., 2009). deBruyn et al.'s (2009) study reports that adolescents who were popular and disliked bullied more than those who were popular and liked. They also reported that rejected bullies may not use aggression to acquire status in the way the popular bullies do, but they may use aggression more to attract attention or respect by making others fear them.

Research with early adolescents has shown the associations of bullying and victimization with peer acceptance. Bullies and victims tend to be in low acceptance, which means their peers dislike or reject them. Conversely, being accepted buffers against victimization. Bullies actually have high status when measured by perceived popularity. Adolescents who are rejected and unpopular at the same time have a high rate of victimization. This victim ends up getting caught in a self-perpetuating spiral and bystanders are hesitant to befriend the victim for fear of becoming victims themselves (deBruyn et al., 2009).

Adolescents' peer relations can be seen as predictors of both concurrent and future psychosocial development and peer relationships are widely considered to be the primary context for healthy social-emotional development (Overbeek, 2010). Negative social behaviors like aggression are more likely to lead to rejection from peers (Dijkstra, Lindenberg & Veenstra, 2008). Acceptance and rejection remain risk factors for future negative affective problems and girls tend to be more influenced by rejection than boys (Calvete et al., 2010; Shochet, Smith, Furlong & Homel, 2011).

Dijkstra et al. (2008) found individual bullying was negatively related to peer acceptance, whereas it was positively associated with peer rejection. Bullying behavior of popular adolescents had an additional impact as bullying behavior of popular adolescents goes with less peer acceptance and more peer rejection in school. Bullies that consistently bully over time are less attractive as a friend (Shochet et al., 2011).

Adolescents with low self-esteem are more frequently victimized than are adolescents with high self-esteem (Overbeek, 2010). Adolescents with feelings of low self-esteem attract negative attention from peers provoking specific bullying behaviors

from others. This may signal feelings of insignificance and cautiousness, implying they will not retaliate when offended (deBruyn et al., 2009). Patchin and Hinduja (2010a) looked at 774 adolescents ages 11 to 16 and their findings supported that peer victimization predicted low self-esteem but low self-esteem did not predict peer victimization and rejection. Sontag et al. (2011) reported the opposite, where they found adolescents perceived as more powerful or threatening in real life were more likely to be the targets of cyber aggression.

It is well documented that peer relations and status have a very large impact on adolescent behavior. My conceptual framework suggests that peer relations are very important in whether or not an adolescent who has never bullied face-to-face will choose to bully online.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The use of technology by adolescents, especially the Internet, via both computers and cell phones has increased dramatically in recent years. The nature of new technology makes it possible for cyber bullying to occur more secretly, spread more rapidly, involve more adolescents in the process, and preserve easily (Li, 2007). Although recently cyber bullying has received more attention in the media, few studies exist that assess the nature of this phenomenon. Early research studies the overall frequency of cyber use and cyber bullying among primarily middle to late adolescent samples (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Cyber bullying represents a problem of significant magnitude and it is important to recognize that the acts of cyber bullying bring about very serious consequences, some having been documented as deadly where others make irreversible impressions on

adolescents at a time critical for social development (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011). Cyber bullying appears to be related to increased reports of behavior problems at school. One study indicated one in four adolescents frequently targeted by rumors and one in five frequently targeted by online threats report having carried a weapon to school (Ybarra et al., 2007). Educators need to be cognizant of the wide range of reasons why and how students' cyber bully and devise a variety of interventions to address this epidemic (Cassidy et al., 2009).

The literature on cyber bullying was helpful in identifying the difference between it and traditional bullying as well as its prevalence, especially at the secondary school level. The literature, while starting to grow, is also beginning to focus on possible influences looking through both theoretical and non-theoretical lenses. Research findings have resulted in bringing this fairly new, and definitely detrimental, phenomenon to light while stressing the negative impacts it is having on youth from death to impacts on social development to the inability for victims to learn or feel safe at school. There is some evidence being presented as to the reasons why cyber bullying occurs. However, most, if not all evidence is being presented through quantitative analysis which uses primarily surveys as the only tool of data collection. This study contributes to the literature by providing a qualitative analysis of the artifacts using a phenomenological design to describe what ninth grade students at one school experience when choosing to cyber bully.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to review in greater detail the research design and methodology of this study. The intent of this study was to explore and analyze the experiences of adolescents who had never bullied face to face but have bullied online through the use of a social networking site. This chapter will include an overview of the purpose, methods, research design, data collection, analysis, and the delimitations of the study.

#### **Overview of Purpose and Methods**

Patchin and Hinduja (2006) suggested it is important for us to determine if cyber bullies are simply traditional bullies or if they are adolescents that have never participated in school-based bullying. While research is limited in the area of cyber bullying, most research up to this point has taken the quantitative approach. The purpose of this study was to capture the voices of ninth grade students who had never bullied in the traditional sense but have bullied via online social networking sites. I examined the pathway and experiences behind the process of an adolescent becoming a cyber bully and the ways in which adolescents understand their own cyber bullying behavior.

Mertens (2005) suggests that qualitative research comes from the current inadequacies of current theory and research. Very little is known about the process of adolescents becoming bullies via cyberspace and the qualitative nature of this study

will help to fill the current gap in the research. This study employed a qualitative analysis of student artifacts produced through a classroom set of lessons on bullying. This analysis followed a phenomenological design. I described both the range of experiences students revealed and what the participants in the study had in common as they transitioned from never having bullied face to face to becoming a cyber bully through the vehicle of social networking sites, the phenomenon. The phenomenological design was selected for this study because this approach allows the researcher to explore, describe or analyze a person's lived experience with a given phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The process of becoming an adolescent who engages in cyber bullying, but not traditional bullying, was the specific phenomenon of concern for this study. Creswell (2007) adds that the phenomenological approach attempts to get at the essence of what the participants are experiencing and to seek a more thorough understanding of the feelings and behaviors the participants' share.

### **Methodology Overview and Rationale**

Creswell (2009) maintains there are three basic strategies of inquiry: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. Quantitative strategies typically use instruments and surveys as a means of data collection where the questions are often closed-ended. Qualitative strategies are usually less about numbers and more about experiences where the questions are usually open-ended and examined through text, observation, or images. Mixed method strategies employ both quantitative and qualitative characteristics within the same study. For this study, I selected an emergent qualitative approach that used data generated through open-ended prompts. These prompts elicited participants' descriptions

of actual lived experiences with the phenomenon of concern in an attempt to answer my research questions.

A strength of the qualitative methodology is it allows the researcher to elicit inferred knowledge and subjective understandings and interpretations. In other words, in qualitative research the researcher learns from participants, and attempts to understand the meaning of their lives. Qualitative methods look into deep, complex problems regarding a phenomenon, especially where there has yet to be any relevancies identified (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Using a phenomenological qualitative approach to shape a study of how and why adolescents, who have never bullied face-to-face, cyber bully will begin to illuminate an issue around which little to anything is known; i.e. the experiences of youth in becoming a cyber bully.

In qualitative research, the researcher attempts to make knowledge claims based on multiple meanings of personal experiences and this information is usually gathered from open-ended emerging data to identify themes or patterns (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research often takes place in the natural setting where the participant(s) does not need to leave their normal surroundings. This research study did exactly that by carrying out a qualitative analysis of student artifacts from a bullying lesson the students participated in as part of the normal curriculum. The students produced these artifacts in their regularly scheduled class by completing a variety of activities as a normal part of participating in the course. The students who produced the artifacts that produced the data for this study never left their natural setting. They were also never asked to participate in new or additional activities that were not already used by the teachers within these classrooms.

There are multiple ways to conduct qualitative research—phenomenology, case study, and grounded theory are but a few examples. The most appropriate method for this research study is phenomenological. The intent of a phenomenological study is to understand and describe an event from the viewpoint of the participants. It provides an opportunity to study individuals who have a common experience with a phenomenon and learn how they interpret themselves in respect to their lived experience with the phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The goal is to listen or look for the essence of the human experiences concerning the phenomenon attempting to understand at a deep level the unique events being experienced by the individual (Creswell, 2009). The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of ninth grade students who have become cyber bullies on social networking sites, looking for how they viewed their experiences and that of their victim(s).

Within the confines of the phenomenological approach there are various approaches including two commonly employed variations called hermeneutic and transcendental. Moustakas (1994) defines hermeneutic phenomenology as an approach where the research is oriented toward the lived experience and interpreting the texts of life. This approach focuses more on the interpretation of the researcher in relation to the phenomenon. Moustakas indicates that the transcendental approach, however, is focused less on the interpretive views of the researcher and more on the personal sense making of lived experiences as articulated by the participants. This study took the transcendental approach.

I selected the transcendental phenomenological approach because it served my purpose of the study which was to capture the voices of ninth grade students who had

never engaged in traditional face-to-face bullying but have cyber bullied. The overarching question that guided my research was: What do students reveal about their path of becoming a cyber bully through the artifacts completed as part of an instructional program taken in ninth grade? I established four sub-questions which included: (1) How do students understand the difference between traditional bullying and cyber bullying, (2) How do students understand their pathway that led them to become a cyber bully, (3) How do they experience being a cyber bully and how do they feel being involved in this behavior, and (4) How does the student view the victim receiving the online bullying? These sub-questions guided the prompts for the student generated artifacts in such a way as to have the students examine and interpret their own lived experience.

This study was designed to collect data as the student participants went through lessons designed to capture the personal stories and understandings of ninth grade students relative to bullying. Through my participation with the teachers I was able to specifically shape the questions and directions for the class activities to specifically gather information critical to addressing the research questions using the transcendental approach. These activities specifically allowed the students to describe their experiences through both the written word and the use of an online program allowing them to use pictures and captions to tell their story.

### **Study Setting and Subjects**

“Choosing the setting, site, population, or phenomenon of interest is fundamental to the design of the study and serves as a guide for the researcher” (Marshall & Rossman,

2011, p. 99). This section will review in detail the site, sample and recruitment procedures of this study.

## **Setting**

Since I conducted a qualitative analysis of artifacts (student class work) on the topic of cyber bullying, it was critical to identify a school where there was an intentional focus placed on that topic. The site needed to provide a student curricular experience where ninth grade students had an opportunity to share their experiences and insight about the topic of cyber bullying through multiple means.

This research took place at one high school in the state of Michigan. The high school selected for this research, at the time of the research, had a total student population of approximately 2,500 grades nine through 12. This particular high school was unique in that it required ninth grade students to take a course involving character education which included an intentional focus on bullying, specifically cyber bullying. This particular course was 12 weeks in length and focused on building character and global skills that helps students succeed in life. The standards within this particular class included: (a) learning the value of building relationships and developing skills to assist students in doing so, (b) understanding the factors that influence self-concept and the impact it has on life experiences, (c) learning to build qualities that increase emotional intelligence, (d) understanding the tools of effective communication, (e) examining and determining their own values, standards, and principles, (f) identifying forms of peer pressure and demonstrate rescuing skills, (g) understanding and accepting responsibility for their own thoughts, attitudes, and actions, (h) identifying ways to make family

relationships more meaningful, and (i) demonstrating effective use of posture, movement, gesture, facial expression, eye contact, and voice when delivering a speech. As these standards are taught students engage in a variety of activities that included: self-reflection surveys, journals, worksheet activities, group activities and competitions, mock interviews and a variety of speeches. These standards and activities were approved by the district level Curriculum Council. This allows the high school to grant credit for successful completion of the course. Permission was requested, via letter, from the district superintendent to allow the researcher access to this school (see Appendix A).

When students worked on the standard of accepting responsibility for their own thoughts, attitudes, and actions, the teachers covered the unit on bullying. The unit began by asking all students to reflect on their experiences with bullying up to that point in their lives, both in the traditional and cyber sense. The student reflections were guided by specific activities designed to elicit student experiences with an understanding of the bullying process. Students participated in journal writings specific to their experiences; they wrote a six paragraph opinion paper on the topic of cyber bullying; and they created a photo story on the computer in regard to cyber bullying. In addition, the students were given information on the topic of bullying and viewed clips of news reports about other adolescents their age and their experiences as a bully and/or victim. This unit has been part of this course for more than three years and the teachers, in collaboration, have worked to make it as meaningful as possible for all students experiencing it.

The focus of this course is on building relational capacity between the teacher and students, as well as, the students with each other. The teachers of this course are very intentional in creating these relationships, and by class end, staff and students report that

they hear many students referring to the class as a family. The unit on bullying did not occur until somewhere between the seventh and eighth week of the course, so the relationships and trust within the classes were well established. Due to this, I am very confident that the answers students gave on all of the activities were honest and a true reflection of their experiences and thoughts.

### **Subjects and Sampling**

Participants in this study were students in a character education course at the high school selected for this study. The teachers in this study worked with me to adapt the character education lessons on bullying to incorporate the features of a transcendental engagement around the topic of bullying. Student participants were those students who met the inclusionary criteria for this study from the character education classes taught by the teacher participants.

**Teachers.** As indicated this research was a qualitative analysis of student artifacts (class work). As principal of the building where the research was conducted, I have access to all student work in all courses offered in the building. One of my responsibilities as principal is to monitor student achievement and progress and to ensure teachers are following the district established guidelines for grading. Another role I play is to work in collaboration with all teachers in the building in shaping student work and assessments. This is to insure that the students are being asked to complete work that is measuring the standards the district has approved for each course. This includes the course in which the artifacts were pulled as part of this research. My normal relationship to the teachers and students through this unit of study makes my involvement as



participant researcher one that is fully natural. As a result, the students who created the artifacts that served as data for this study were operating in a natural setting and their engagement was part of the normal course of their instructional experience. The only influence I, as researcher, had on that experience were the subtle refinements to the instructional prompts designed to help the students reflect deeper, bring forth thick/rich detail about their lived experiences with cyber bullying, and interpret the meanings they associate with those experiences—all of which are hallmarks of transcendental phenomenology.

**Teacher recruitment.** I met with the three teachers who teach the character education course in the building. In this meeting I explained to them the research I was proposing to conduct and their involvement in the study. It was made clear to them if they decided to participate it would result in me working collaboratively with them to adapt their current unit on bullying. The purpose was to intentionally create activities that addressed the problem I intended to study following the qualitative transcendental phenomenological approach. It added approximately three days to the unit allowing students the time needed to complete the activities. The teachers were also told if they chose to participate they would need to implement the new lessons in all of their classes. Upon completion of this explanation all three teachers agreed to participate in the study and we immediately started restructuring the unit.

It is also important to note that, at no time, was this study looking to analyze the teachers of the course or their implementation of the lesson. The intent of the study was to only analyze the students' experiences with cyber bullying through the artifacts they created (survey responses, reflections, descriptive paper, and picture story) throughout

the lesson. This study was exempted from HSIRB review based on the process described above (see Appendix B). Teachers were not required to sign a formal consent form.

**Student participants.** At the time of this study the total ninth grade student population was approximately 700 students. The potential student participants were those students who completed the instructional activities that produced the artifacts from the classes at the study high school with teachers who agreed to participate as described in the teacher section. The potential student participants totaled 331 and included both male and female students. The students whose course work provided data for this study closely aligned with the ethnicity and socio-economic status of the school. The ethnicity at the study high school at the time of the study was 44% White, 41% Black, 13% Asian American, and 2% other.

**Inclusionary criteria.** The inclusionary criteria for this study were applied to the students who completed the unit of study and the four types of learning artifacts that produced data for the study. First, the students whose artifacts were included in the study data had to be in the ninth grade and enrolled in the course dealing with character education and completed the lesson on bullying. This only minimally reduced the potential pool of students.

The next inclusionary criteria that needed to be met was the student had to reveal in their class assignments that he/she had never bullied in the traditional sense but has bullied online through a social networking site. This reduced the potential participants substantially, to a total of 51. The reason this criteria was set was because that was the sample I wanted to specifically study. The gap in current research, as discussed in the literature review, was clear in that there has been no study that has specifically looked at

adolescents who had never engaged in traditional bullying, yet become involved in cyber bullying.

The last inclusionary criteria for the inclusion of a student's artifacts to be included in the data sample for this study was that the student must have been present for and completed all of the activities as part of the unit on bullying. This was important because all four artifacts produced for this study worked together to generate transcendental recall of lived experiences and meaning making of those experiences. If I had artifacts missing from various participants it would have had the potential of reducing the validity of the study. This criterion did not reduce the pool of eligible students. The reported daily attendance averages in the building where the study was conducted is 95% plus present on a daily basis.

**Number of participants.** While this study is a qualitative analysis of artifacts, it used a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological study involves locating participants who are experiencing the phenomenon that is being explored (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). In this study, the phenomenon was students who had never bullied in the traditional sense (face-to-face) but have bullied in cyberspace through social networking sites. In a phenomenological study there have been "sample sizes from as few as one to as many as 325, however; you usually will see a range from three to ten" (Creswell, 2007, p. 126). The total student population for the ninth grade at the study site totaled around 700 students. After employing the inclusionary criteria the pool was reduced to approximately 51. The sample was then narrowed to 20–30 students. This sample was randomly selected from the potential pool of participants who met the inclusionary criteria. As I randomly select students I employed purposive sampling. I looked at all of

a student's artifacts to increase my confidence in the power of the data. I analyzed data from 20 students to start and added additional data sets as needed to achieve saturation and verification of findings. This was accomplished at student 29.

**Sampling approach.** Both Marshall and Rossman (2011) and Creswell (2009) suggest various types of sampling. In this study, implemented criterion sampling where all participants met the same criterion was useful for quality insurance. The criterion that all students had to meet was the student had never bullied in the traditional sense but has bullied online through the use of a social networking site. The sampling process began by the teachers in each of the classes narrowing the pool of candidates based on the self-reflection survey all students completed at the beginning of the lesson. This survey was required as part of the normal lesson because it was important to have students think about their personal experiences. This allowed them to bring more meaning to the activities they eventually encountered as part of the lesson. This survey clearly delineated the students that fit the criterion. The teachers, once all eligible students were identified, compiled all of the artifacts for each student fitting the criterion. They then de-identified the data before submitting the artifacts to me. Once I received all of the artifacts from the eligible students, I randomly selected 20–30 students from the pool, the final number determined by when saturation of the data was achieved, which again was at student 29.

**Student recruitment.** Given the fact that in my role as principal I have access to all student work in the building there was no recruitment process necessary for the students involved in this study. At no time did I have contact with any students in the research; nor was I at any time in the classroom observing as this particular unit was

being presented. I only had access to the de-identified artifacts of any student who met the criteria for the research.

### **Data Collection**

According to Marshall and Rossman (2011) researchers tend to rely on four primary methods for gathering information: (1) participating in the actual setting, (2) observation, (3) interviews, and (4) analyzing documents. This study relied solely on the last type of data, the analysis of artifacts (documents) that are part of the bullying lesson included in the required character education course. Typically, in a phenomenological study, if the researcher is conducting an interview, he will generally prepare the questions in advance (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). While I am not interviewing the students, I worked in collaboration with the teachers of the course to write questions or prompts, whether for their initial survey, journal or paper activity, or directions for their photo story. This was to ensure the students were able to specifically reflect on their experiences and the implications the experiences had in their lives as it related to the phenomenon of cyber bullying and my research questions. All of the activities and lessons within this course have been approved by the district's curriculum council which oversees the curriculum within the district grades kindergarten through grade 12.

### **Data Types and Sources**

I will be conducting a qualitative analysis using a phenomenological approach. I was interested in the lived experiences of students who had never bullied in the traditional sense but have bullied online through the use of a social networking site. This

was the best approach in order to answer my overarching research question which briefly restated is: What do students reveal about their path of becoming a cyber bully through artifacts completed as part of an instructional program taken in ninth grade?

Documents are often drawn upon in a qualitative study which are produced in the course of everyday events or constructed specifically for the research at hand (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In this study, it is both. The documents collected were part of the everyday student experience within the context of the instructional program. However, I worked collaboratively with the instructors of this course to construct the activities so they specifically addressed the phenomenon I was studying. Marshall and Rossman continue to add that the analysis of documents is very rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants. This study addressed the current gap in the research by conducting an analysis of documents to understand cyber bullying from the perspective of the cyber bully. This was accomplished by analyzing the cyber bullies' values and beliefs through their class work.

While most artifacts are encoded in text, Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggest it is fruitful to include other types of artifacts in a qualitative study. This was taken into consideration when constructing the documents that students would submit as part of the instructional program. Students at the ninth grade level often have difficulty writing at a depth that will be rich for analysis. For this reason, another type of artifact was created, the photo story. This was an online story created by students using pictures to tell a story about cyber bullying. This added to the richness of data gathered.

The last and possibly greatest advantage of using artifacts was it does not disrupt the day to day events of the individuals being studied. The materials can be gathered

without disturbing the setting and there does not need to be any contact between the researcher and the students involved in the sample (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This was extremely important in this study as the participants were students between the ages of 14 and 16.

Throughout this research I collected and analyzed four different artifacts produced from each student eligible for the study. These artifacts included a survey, journal writing, six paragraph opinion paper, and an online photo story. These artifacts are discussed in greater detail below.

**Survey.** The first assignment for the students in the bullying lesson was a reflective survey (see Appendix C). This survey was 13 questions in length. It asked their experiences with bullying in the traditional sense (questions 1–3), experiences with cyber bullying (questions 4–10), and victimization (questions 11–13). The purpose of this survey in the lesson was to get each student thinking about their own experiences with bullying. This was critical because the other activities implemented as part of the unit were connected specifically to each student’s life experiences, that of a traditional bully, a cyber bully, or a victim of bullying. The teachers of this course were required to get students to think outside of themselves and their own world and attempt to see how their actions impact others. The survey allowed them to reflect then proceed through a variety of additional activities that asked them to go into greater depth about their life experiences.

**Journal activity.** The next activity students participated in was the journal writing. The students, based on their responses to the survey were given one of three possible questions to reflect on and then write (see Appendix C). The questions either

asked a student to write about their experience of bullying online and how that made them feel (Journal 1), their experience of bullying face to face and how that made them feel (Journal 2), or their experience of being bullied either face to face or online and how that made them feel (Journal 3). The journal question students answered, as stated earlier, was determined by the answers to the survey. If a student answered yes to any question one through three on the survey they answered journal question two. If they answered no to questions one through three and yes to any question numbered four through ten they completed journal one; and if they answered no to questions one through ten and yes to any question 11–13 or no to all questions they completed journal three.

The purpose of the journal writing was to take their self-reflection on the survey one step further by asking the students to articulate an actual experience and the feelings associated with that experience. Students in any of the questions were asked not to use specific names or to use exact comments to insure a sense of confidentiality.

**Six paragraph paper.** The next activity was a six paragraph paper where students were asked to answer six questions in paragraph form (See Appendix C). The purpose of this assignment was to gather student opinions on various topics related specifically to this research. Students were asked to indicate their understanding of traditional bullying and cyber bullying, what they believed makes kids choose to bully online, opinions on bystanders, their feelings if they cyber bullied or witnessed it, online anonymity and what they believe would help in decreasing the growing problem of cyber bullying.

The purpose of this activity was to capture the voices of students who are currently living the experience of cyber bullying. This is the gap in current research, the



fact that we have yet to ask students their opinions and experiences with the phenomenon. The hope of gathering this information was that it has the potential to help adults determine ways to prevent cyber bullying from happening and/or finding more appropriate and effective ways of intervening when it does occur.

**Photo story.** The final activity the students completed was a photo story assignment. Photo story is a program that allows students to create a story online using pictures and inserting captions as desired. The students in this assignment were asked to include the following in the six slide story: (a) character information, (b) background information about the character, (c) the cyber bullying act that occurs, (d) the victim receiving the message, (e) what happens after the victim reads it, and (f) what happens later or how the story ends (See Appendix C).

The purpose of this activity was to allow students to tap into their prior experiences, then to tell a story online which allowed them to use their creative abilities. When working with students in the ninth grade, writing, for many, is a difficult task. Given that fact, the teachers in the curriculum gave students another avenue to share their experiences and feelings. Students today are so well versed with technology and online applications; they really enjoy the opportunity to be creative through this medium.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The artifacts used in the qualitative analysis were a regular part of the instructional program required for all ninth grade students in the school the study was conducted. These artifacts were assignments for the course which were graded by the instructors as part of the students' final course grade determining credit. Artifacts, such

as these assignments, were considered school property as they are collected and graded as part of the instructional program. As principal of the building it is part of my regular role to have access to all student work in all courses in the building.

This particular instructional program lasted 12 weeks and the lesson in which the artifacts were completed was one week during this period. All students in the ninth grade were expected to take this course. During the course of the school year there will be a minimum of 20 sections of this course with an average of 27 students per section. At the end of the school year the instructors of the course will be responsible for de-identifying the data prior to its submission. This research only took place in the second and third 12-week periods due to the collaboration between me and the teachers in restructuring the activities to meet the transcendental phenomenological design.

The three teachers had been instructed on how to determine which students were eligible for the study. These were students that had never bullied traditionally, but have bullied online. This was determined by the survey the students initially completed. All students who answered the journal one activity were initially eligible for the study. Once they compiled the work for each of the eligible students, they de-identified the artifacts by establishing a number system for each student. This was done in collaboration with one another so when submitted it was impossible for me to determine which instructor the student had. In addition to de-identifying the data using a number system, the teachers also redacted any names used within any of the activities to insure confidentiality and anonymity. The instructors, at the completion of the school year, submitted to me all of the artifacts in one file. Each student, identified only by number, had each of their artifacts submitted together. For example, student number one had the

survey, journal and paper all attached as one submission. The photo stories were submitted separately on an encrypted hard drive but were identified by the corresponding number to the written artifacts.

Once I received the artifacts for all eligible students I determined the potential participants. I initially looked at the surveys. This study was looking at students who have bullied online via social media. Some of the questions in the survey asked about text messages, which was not the student I was studying. I looked at only those students who answered yes to questions numbered six through ten. Once that potential pool was determined I randomly selected a minimum of 20 to analyze, the final number determined by the richness of the data.

Creswell (2007) indicates he is surprised by how little attention is given to storing qualitative data. Once the data was submitted I did the following: (a) created a back-up copy of the flash drive with the photo stories, (b) created a master list of all the types of information that was gathered, (c) created a second hard copy for each of the written artifacts and, (d) developed a data collection matrix to assist in locating specific artifacts in the study as needed.

### **Trustworthiness**

Truth value in qualitative research is usually obtained from the discovery of human experiences as they are lived and perceived by those in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Sandelowski (1986) added a qualitative study is credible when the researcher is able to present such accurate interpretations of the human experience that others who share that experience would immediately recognize the description. In my

research I analyzed the experiences of a group of adolescents that have not yet been studied through the analysis of their own words and experiences.

Guba (1981) indicated that there are a variety of specific strategies that can be used throughout qualitative research that can increase the worth of the project. One such strategy I implemented was that of triangulation. In the step of data collection, I specifically implemented triangulation of the data sources. Guba suggests this specific type of triangulation maximizes the range of data that might contribute to the complete understanding of the concept being studied. Triangulated sources may be collected in a variety of time, different seasons or days, different settings, and/or different groupings. In my research, the data collected was from students in classes instructed by three different teachers, at two different times of the year and at various times of the day within their schedule.

### **Data Analysis**

In this section I will explain my data analysis approach with the artifacts and my rationale for selecting this approach. I will also include my analysis procedures and address the issue of trustworthiness as it applies to my qualitative analysis.

#### **Data Analysis Approach**

Marshall and Rossman (2011) are quick to remind us that qualitative analysis is messy, ambiguous, creative and often time-consuming. It is a search for general statements about underlying themes both exploring and describing something. In qualitative studies the researcher is guided by initial concepts and the development of

understandings that will shift and be modified as the data is collected and analyzed. The analysis should be guided by the preliminary research questions and literature review which will assist in the analysis. Creswell (2007) indicates there has been an advance in the structured methods of analysis in phenomenological designs.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

In this section my data analysis procedures will be explained and the steps taken to ensure the results are credible, dependable and authentic. To guide the data analysis, I used the phases of analysis as suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2011). These phases include: (a) organizing the data, (b) immersion in the data, (c) generating categories and themes, (d) coding the data, (e) interpretations through analytic memos, and (f) searching for alternative understandings. Through each of these stages I also engaged in data reduction and interpretation. It is important to note that beyond the organization of the data these phases were not necessarily occurring in chronological order but in fact were occurring in conjunction with one another.

### **Organizing the Data**

In this stage it was important to keep the artifacts provided by each participant separate so it remained manageable, easily accessible and readily available. The artifacts submitted for each participant was separated into file folders with each folder being clearly identified by the number of the participant. Index cards were generated for each file, one for each of the artifacts. These cards were attached to the front of every file folder with the artifact name on the top of each index card. This was where notes were

written as the data was analyzed. An electronic spreadsheet was also created for the artifacts as back up.

### **Immersion in the Data**

Reading, rereading and reading again was how I immersed myself into the data. The goal was to become extremely familiar with each of the artifacts. With the photo story I looked and relooked at the pictures and simple text to pull out varying details and information from each and every slide. This was critical as each look proved to identify something new and different than the view before. As I immersed myself into the artifacts I created notes on the notecards for each participant and their particular artifacts. These again were attached to the front of each file folder. This provided me with a quick and easy way to refer back to the original data as the analysis continued.

### **Generating Categories and Themes**

Once I had immersed myself in the data, I then began to generate themes. Prior to this I first wrote about my personal experiences with the phenomenon being studied. While I do witness this with adolescents serving as a principal in a high school, I personally have never experienced the phenomenon of cyber bullying from either the bully or victim perspective since this did not exist when I was an adolescent. I still wrote about my experiences, though, so the focus was directed to the participants in the study. This is explained in more detail later.

The next step in my analysis was to develop a list of significant statements, these may have been already identified on my notecards or I may have needed to go back into

the data to search for significant statements. Once I identified the statements about how the participants had experienced the phenomenon, I listed these horizontally as recommended by Moustakas (1994). He suggests this will allow a researcher to treat each statement as having equal worth and it assists in the development of a list that is not repetitive or overlapping. I then grouped these statements into larger units of information, called coding categories.

### **Coding the Data**

Prior to beginning this process, I developed a list of theory-generated codes based on my literature review as an initial construct in which to view the data. However, in vivo codes emerged as well. Coding the data, according to Marshall and Rossman (2011) simply refers to the formal representation of the researcher's analytic thinking. These codes came from various sources, such as the literature review, the words and pictures in the data, and my insight as the researcher. I used abbreviations to identify various coding categories from the data and began to cluster smaller categories into broader ones that furthered refined into themes and subthemes. Creswell (2009) suggests the researcher consider four different types of codes: (1) codes on topics the readers would expect to find based on literature, (2) codes that are surprising, (3) codes that are unusual, and (4) codes that address a larger theoretical perspective.

### **Analytic Memos**

Throughout the analytic process it is important the researcher writes notes, reflective memos and insights which, allows the researcher to move to a more creative

analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As I reviewed the data, I used the process of writing my initial thoughts and reactions and began to offer my own interpretations of the data. This was significant as it helped to identify and set aside any biases I had, and it also allowed me to evaluate my initial thoughts to the final findings to see how they compared. During this stage, I began to interpret the data to find significance in the path of becoming a cyber bully through pulling salient themes, reoccurring opinions, similar experiences, and patterns that resonated collectively within the artifacts.

### **Offering Interpretations**

In this part of the analysis, I began to bring meaning to the themes and patterns and categories so it made sense; ultimately as Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggest, it told a story. I selected the most useful information to address my research questions and determined how they were central to the phenomenon of cyber bullying.

### **Alternative Understandings**

As I began to discover themes and patterns in the data, I critically challenged myself and my interpretations. Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggest that alternative explanations always exist so it is of utmost importance for the researcher to demonstrate how his/her interpretation is plausible. Creswell (2009) recommends a researcher identifies one or more strategies available to check the accuracy of findings. I incorporated the strategies of triangulation, clarification of any bias, peer debriefing and the use of an external auditor to add to the trustworthiness of my research.



**Triangulation.** Triangulation is a powerful strategy that enhances the quality of research. Creswell (2009) suggests to build a coherent justification for themes triangulating different data sources of information is important. If themes are determined by merging various sources of data, representation of different participant perspectives, then it can add to the validity of the study. Marshall and Rossman (2011) add that data from different sources can be used to illuminate the research. While, in this study, I only collected artifacts from students participating in an instructional program, I collected artifacts that allowed students to use different mediums in sharing their ideas/opinions/experiences. I collected textual artifacts and an artifact that allowed the students to tell a story using an online program which implemented pictures. The strategy of providing different slices of data minimizes the noise that can be existent in qualitative research if only using one source of data or from a biased researcher (Field & Morse, 1985).

**Clarifying bias.** Good qualitative research includes a good deal of reflection on the part of the researcher which includes sharing how the interpretation of the results is shaped by their background (Creswell, 2009). As a school principal, where I am immersed in the behavior of cyber bullying as it has begun to creep into the school environment, I shared how my experiences may shape how I interpret the data. While I have never experienced first-hand cyber bullying I am forced to handle student to student situations in my current position. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the use of a field journal. In this journal, a researcher includes the researcher's thoughts, feelings and ideas about the study and data. They suggest this helps the researcher become more aware of their own biases and pre-conceived assumptions. More recent authors such as Marshall

and Rossman (2011) and Creswell (2007) refer to this as an epoche. I wrote my experiences and feelings down in an effort to take a fresh perspective on the topic. This strategy is commonly used in a transcendental phenomenology which I conducted.

**Peer debriefing.** This validity strategy involves locating a person who reviews my research and asks questions to challenge me about the study (Creswell, 2009).

Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggest the individual should be knowledgeable about the process of conducting a qualitative study and be available to give the feedback. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest this is one way to keep the researcher honest, and seeking deeper questions and feedback from others may contribute to a deeper analysis. As a doctoral candidate, I am surrounded by several other candidates that have been able to give me feedback and challenge me along the way. I used the expertise of my advisor along with other staff from Western Michigan University to give me critical feedback on the research.

**External auditor.** The difference between a peer debriefer and an external auditor is that the auditor is not familiar with either me or the research. Basically, this person serves as an independent investigator to look over many aspects of the project (Creswell, 2009). I have many peers in the county in which I work who have the knowledge of research, but are not familiar with me as an individual or my research. I called upon two individuals who critically read my research and provided feedback to enhance the overall validity of the study.

## **Analysis Plan by Data Type**

This section will provide an overview of how I analyzed the various data types collected as part of this study. It will include a brief overview of what information the data artifact is intended to collect and the specific analysis that will be used with each artifact.

### **Survey Data Analysis**

As part of participating in the character education course students began the unit on cyber bullying by completing a self-reflection survey on their experiences with bullying up to that point in their lives. This survey was designed to allow me to determine the students who have bullied in the traditional form, those who have bullied in the cyber form, those who have bullied in both forms, those who have never bullied in either form but have been a victim of one or the other form of bullying, and lastly those who have never bullied in any form nor have ever been a victim of either form of bullying.

The results of the survey served two purposes. The first was it allowed me to analyze and create a data profile for all students in this course. By looking at the information I created an overall analysis of all ninth grade students in this course as it related to bullying. The survey also gave me the gender and ethnicity (White or minority) of each student. This information was also analyzed to create the overall data profile.

The second purpose of the survey was to specify those students eligible to be a participant in the study. By answering no to questions one through three (relating to

traditional bullying) and answering yes to at least one of the questions six through 10 (relating to cyber bullying) a student became eligible to participate, which resulted in their other artifacts from the course as eligible to be analyzed.

### **Journal Data Analysis**

The journal activity was a free writing activity which asked students to explain the experience they had with being a cyber bully. In analyzing this artifact I took the emergent theme approach. Theming data is appropriate for almost all qualitative studies, but especially for phenomenologies (Saldana, 2013). Richards (2009) suggests that a good researcher discovers themes in the data, or threads in the data, by thoroughly exploring the data and asking good sound questions when doing so. A theme, according to Saldana (2013), is an outcome of analytic reflection. With the journal writings I read and reread each one looking for themes or similarities within the student experiences of being a cyber bully and ways of relating the experiences with one another. I specifically looked for extended phrases or sentences that identified what the data was about or what it meant.

Saldana (2013) explains that a theme at minimum describes a researcher's observations and at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon. Since a phenomenology aims to gain a deeper understanding or meaning from a lived experience, looking for emerging themes from the written experiences of the cyber bully is the best way to analyze this particular artifact.

## **Six Paragraph Paper Analysis**

For the analysis of the paper I used structural coding. Structural coding both codes and categorizes the data to look for commonalities, differences, and relationships (Saldana, 2013). This type of coding usually results in the identification of large segments of text within and or across topics. Saldana (2013) states “structural coding applies a conceptual phrase to a topic of inquiry to a segment of data that relates to a specific research question used to frame the interview” (p. 84). The six paragraph paper specifically asked students to report their opinions on six different topics as it related to cyber bullying and traditional bullying. These topics related directly to the research questions in this study. I looked at determining the frequency the participants in the study mentioned a particular theme within each of the six paragraphs.

## **Photo Story Analysis**

The photo story will be analyzed like the journal, by themeing. The photo story activity required students to tell a story online using pictures, and captions if they chose, to tell the story of a cyber bully. Saldana (2013) indicates that themeing the data is more applicable to documents and artifacts, rather than researcher generated field notes. This is another example of an artifact the students in this class completed as part of the unit on bullying. With this artifact I looked at the photos to depict any common themes. In this case, instead of looking for extended phrases or sentences to derive meaning, I analyzed the pictures looking for similarities among cyber bullying experiences.

## **Cross-Analysis**

Upon completion of the individual analysis with all of the artifacts, I then engaged in a cross artifact analysis. In this analysis I looked for emerging themes across the various activities. Richards (2009) indicates comparing different documents can highlight common issues, experiences, and central themes. I focused on finding these themes as I analyzed the independent findings of the separate documents.

### **Analysis Plan by Research Question**

In this section I will overview how I will analyze data to address the research questions in this study. This will include which artifacts will be used in answering the question and specifically how each artifact will be analyzed.

### **Overarching Research Question**

The overarching question that will guide my research is: What do students reveal about their path of becoming a cyber bully through artifacts completed as part of an instructional program taken in ninth grade? In order to answer this question I used all of the artifacts collected from the students included in the sample. This includes the survey, journal writing, six paragraph paper, and photo story.

My analysis began by independently analyzing each of the artifacts produced by students in the class who are included in the random sample for my study. The survey was used to identify the potential pool and any demographic commonalities shared by the entire population and the pool of students eligible for this study. The journal writing was analyzed by looking for emergent themes. Saldana (2013) suggests a theme is an

outcome of analytic reflection. I will be reflecting on the experience of cyber bullying as described by the students in this activity. I used the same analysis approach with the photo story. This required me to spend more time looking at the photos and captions the students used to tell their story. I looked for commonalities and emerging themes from the online photo story. The six paragraph paper was analyzed using structural coding. This type of coding usually results in the identification of large segments of text within and/or across topics (Saldana, 2013). I looked at the frequency of common themes as I implemented this coding process.

I then conducted a cross analysis of all the artifacts looking for emergent themes, common issues, and experiences. By pulling all of the artifacts together in effort to find the common themes, experiences and issues I hoped to answer the overarching question of my study.

### **Sub-Question One**

Sub-question one in my research is: How do students understand the difference between traditional bullying and cyber bullying? The analysis for this question came directly from the six paragraph paper. In this paper students were asked to respond to six different questions. One question specifically asked students to explain their understanding of bullying and a second question asked them about the bystanders' role in the different types of bullying. As indicated, I used structural coding in the analysis of this paper to determine the frequency with which the participants in the study mentioned a particular theme.

### **Sub-Questions Two and Three**

These two questions are: (1) How do students understand the pathway that led them to become a cyber bully, and (2) How do they experience being a cyber bully and how do they feel about being involved with this behavior? Sub-questions two and three were analyzed in two different ways. First, I looked at the journal artifact. The journal was analyzed by looking for emerging themes. This artifact specifically asked the student to tell their story from their lived experience in being a cyber bully and how engaging in that behavior made them feel.

I also answered these two sub-questions by looking at one specific paragraph in the six paragraph paper. Students were specifically asked to write about their experience with using social networking sites to bully and to identify how that made them feel during and after they engaged in that behavior. I used structural coding as I analyzed this question in the six paragraph paper.

### **Sub-Question Four**

Sub-question four in my study is: How does the student view the victim receiving the online bullying? This question was analyzed by reflecting specifically on the photo story artifact. As part of this activity, students were instructed to include a slide which specifically showed the victim receiving the online message. These students were using their own personal lived experiences as they created the photo story. By reflecting on the pictures and captions the students included in this particular portion of the activity, I identified any emerging themes the stories had in common in regard to the victim.



## **Delimitations**

While this study was specifically designed to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of cyber bullying from the bullies' experiences, it has some delimitations. First, although the findings may be transferrable, the reader will need to determine if the demographics of the participants in the study and the location of the school district allows for it. Participation in this study is delimited to only 9<sup>th</sup> grade students from one high school that had never bullied in the traditional form but have bullied online via a social networking site. It also gleaned the artifacts from an instructional program that specifically addressed this issue of bullying as a lesson within the course. This implies that students at this school are likely more aware of the concept of cyber bullying in general, which may make them different than students from schools who do not intentionally address this issue.

Another delimitation within the design is it did not at all look at the cyber bullies who have also been traditional bullies, nor did it look at cyber bullying from the victim's perspective giving him or her voice. These would be areas future research could address. Although this study gives us a deeper understanding of the cyber bully and the processes/thoughts/feelings experienced while on the path to becoming one, it does not suggest how to deal with or handle the phenomenon of cyber bullying within a school setting. This study also only looked at artifacts from 20–30 different students. While Creswell (2009) indicates this is an appropriate sample size for this type of study, it is certainly not large enough to generalize to the general population. Lastly, relative to the design, another delimitation to this study is the fact that only artifacts were analyzed. Due to the age of the participants in the study I was not able to employ other types of data

collection such as interviews or focus groups. This certainly would have added to the richness of the data and possibly led to different or additional interpretations.

In studies there are also limitations which are elements over which the researcher has no control. One limitation is the findings from the data analysis could be subject to other interpretations. My assumptions as a researcher could always differ from the assumptions another researcher might find when looking at the same data.

### **The Researcher**

As the researcher in this study, I relate very closely to the topic of cyber bullying. I currently serve as a principal in the high school where the study was conducted where I witness firsthand the effects it has on students' emotional well-being and the academic environment as a whole. There has been an increase in parents coming in to school with printed evidence of online bullying and asking for administrative help from the school. Unfortunately, without a real understanding of why students are choosing to behave with this type of aggression online, it is difficult, if even possible, to help resolve the problem.

Marshall and Rossman (2011) express concerns associated with researching in your own backyard and those concerns include: (a) the expectations of the researcher based familiarity, (b) the transition to researcher from a more familiar role, (c) ethical and political dilemmas, and (d) the risk of uncovering potentially damaging knowledge. In regard to the first three concerns, none of those issues arose. While I am certainly familiar with the school in which the research was conducted, I had no expectations from the results. I did not have any contact with any of the students at any time during the duration of the study. The students were completing activities as ninth grade students

have for the past three school years as part of the bullying lesson, which is part of the regular curriculum. When I received the artifacts, they were de-identified so there was no way for me to determine who the students were in the sample. While I analyzed the artifacts qualitatively, as a researcher, I never served in the role of researcher during the school day. At school I remained in the role of principal at all times. There were not any ethical and/or political dilemmas with the research. Again, the artifacts were part of normal school property, just like test scores. This particular district is very proactive in respect to tackling the issue of bullying and welcomed any further understanding of what is happening with our students and their choices in respect to bullying. The one concern Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggested, the risk of uncovering potentially damaging knowledge, could be a potential roadblock. When researching a phenomenon through the voices of adolescents there is never any guarantee of what they might unveil. It could be something as minor as the fact students are accessing the social networking sites and engaging in bullying behavior during school hours to something major as student personal struggles leading them to engage in this behavior. Either way, this risk was specifically discussed in writing and shared with the superintendent of schools prior to approval for conducting the study.

While the concerns shared by Marshall and Rossman (2011) are very legitimate, they also indicate there are positive aspects to researching in your own setting. These positive aspects include: (a) easy access to the participants, (b) reduced time expenditure, and (c) the potential for building trusting relationships. The artifacts which were analyzed were collected within a classroom setting where the students had been able to build a positive relationship with their teacher. The intentionality of building this type of

environment, as part of this course, provided the students with a safe comfortable setting where they were more honest about their opinions and experiences.

### **Summary**

This chapter summarized the research design, methodology, data collection, and analysis of this study. Through an in depth qualitative analysis of student artifacts using a phenomenological approach, this study explored the path of becoming a cyber bully with students who had never bullied in the traditional sense. I used purposeful criterion sampling when selecting the participants. Data analysis followed Marshall and Rossman's (2011) suggested procedures and based on Creswell's (2009) suggestions I also put into place steps to ensure the study was credible and validity was achieved. Finally, I ended with a discussion of the delimitations of the study. The next two chapters will discuss the results from the data analysis and its implications.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings by research question. The intent of this study is to explore and analyze the experiences of adolescents who had never bullied face to face but have bullied online through the use of a social networking site. This chapter will include an overview of the purpose, the research questions, and a presentation of findings by research question.

#### **Overview of Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this study is to capture the voices of ninth grade students who have never bullied in the traditional sense but have bullied online via social networking sites. I am examining the pathway and experiences behind an adolescent becoming a cyber bully and the ways in which adolescents understand their own cyber bullying behavior. This study focuses on students in one school setting. The uniqueness of this study is I, as the researcher, will examine and analyze student artifacts from a unit on cyber bullying which is covered as part of the regular school curriculum.

The overarching question that will guide my research is: What do students reveal about their path of becoming a cyber bully through artifacts completed as part of an instructional program taken in ninth grade? In addition to this question, I have developed four sub questions:

1. How do students understand the difference between traditional bullying and cyber bullying?
2. How do students understand the pathway that led them to become a cyber bully?
3. How do they experience being a cyber bully and how do they feel about being involved with this behavior?
4. How does the student view the victim receiving the online bullying?

These questions will help me to understand what makes a cyber bully and attempt to explain the commonalities that these young people share in this position. The questions are meant to provide a general framework, but will not limit or exclude other pertinent information collected by the data.

### **Description of Data**

The potential participants of this study were all students who completed the instructional activities that produced the artifacts from the character education class at the selected site. The students had to complete the lesson on bullying that was created in collaboration with the teachers of the character education course and me, as the researcher. These jointly created lessons were only completed in two of the three trimesters during the school year. Table 1 shows the initial pool broken down by gender and ethnicity.

Table 1  
Initial Population by Gender and Ethnicity

White	Minority	Total
Male = 71	Male = 110	181
Female = 62	Female = 88	150
Total = 133	Total = 198	331

There were a total of 331 students who were present for the lesson on bullying in the character education class. One hundred thirty-three of the students were White (40.2%) and 198 were minority (59.8%). There were more male than female students where 181 of the students were male (54.7%) and 150 were female (45.3%).

The first activity in the lesson was a reflection survey on each individual student's experience with traditional and cyber bullying. This was how I determined the students who were initially eligible for the study. Students eligible had to meet the inclusionary criteria of having never bullied in the traditional sense but have cyber bullied online via a social networking site. Table 2 shows the results of the survey broken down by ethnicity and gender.

Table 2  
Student Survey Results by Gender and Ethnicity

Ethnicity/Gender	Traditional Bully Only	Cyber Bully Only	Both Traditional and Cyber Bully	Never Bullied
White Male	14	6	36	15
Minority Male	29	17	38	26
White Female	9	9	34	10
Minority Female	13	19	38	18
Total	65	51	146	69

In order to be eligible for the sample a student had to have cyber bullied only which narrowed the pool to 51 student participants. I then applied purposeful sampling and looked at the artifacts of the 51 students eligible. I was looking for students who had richer and more detailed information within the artifacts completed in the lesson. After reviewing all of the data I was able to achieve saturation at 29 students. These 29 students were used in the sample for this study. The sample of students by gender and ethnicity is shown in Table 3.



Table 3  
Study Sample Demographics

Male	Female	Total
White = 4	White = 5	White = 9
Minority = 7	Minority = 13	Minority = 20
Total = 11	Total = 18	Total = 29

Eleven of the students in the sample are male (37.9%) and 18 are female (62.1%). In addition 9 students in the study are White (31%) and 20 are Minority (69%).

### **Analysis of Themes**

This section will provide an analysis of the themes extracted from the data reported by research question. The themes will be presented along with sub themes when applicable with quotations pulled from the actual artifacts under analysis.

### **Research Question One**

Student responses to this question were analyzed by reading the six paragraph artifact. This paper was set up by asking students six different questions. The first question asked of students was what they saw as the difference between traditional bullying and cyber bullying. Overall, the experiences of students and how they see the difference between traditional bullying and cyber bullying were expressed around the two following themes: (1) face to face versus the Internet, and (2) one is worse than the

other. When students further defined the difference between the two types of bullying sub-themes arose. Each of the themes and associated sub-themes are summarized in Table 4 and will be developed and discussed in the pages that follow.

Table 4  
Themes and Sub-Themes on Cyber Versus Traditional Bullying

Student Number	1. Face to Face vs. Internet	1.1 Cyber Bullying is easy	1.2 Cyber Bullying is done at anytime	1.3 Cyber Bullying lasts forever	1.4 Cyber Bullies cannot be caught	2. One is worse than the other	2.1 Traditional Bullying is worse	2.2 Cyber Bullying is worse
1	X			X				
2	X				X			
3	X		X					
4	X	X						
6	X	X				X	X	
7	X					X	X	
12	X	X			X	X		X
17	X					X	X	
19	X		X			X		X
21	X					X	X	
24	X	X				X	X	
26	X							
45	X					X		X
53	X	X			X	X	X	
75	X				X	X		X
81	X	X				X	X	
92	X	X		X		X		X
103	X							
116	X	X	X			X		X
134	X				X			
135	X							
137	X							
139	X							
142	X		X			X		X
149	X	X						
155	X							
159	X	X						
163	X					X	X	
170	X							

## **Theme: Face to Face Versus the Internet**

Students in this study all recognized the fact that traditional bullying is carried out face-to-face and done in public settings while cyber bullying is done via the Internet. Student 7 responded by saying, “Traditional bullying is that you bully someone face to face. Cyber bullying is that you bully someone on a social network site or just the Internet.” Student 19 said, “Traditional bullying can only be done in person, while cyber bullying can be done at any time.” Lastly, student 45 indicated, “Traditional bullying is at a place like in school or anywhere in public and cyber bullying is online on social medias over the Internet.” All 28 participants in their own words stated they realized the difference between traditional and cyber bullying and that traditional was carried out in person and in public where cyber was not in person but rather carried out online.

Through their writings, students seemed to further define the difference between the two types of bullying, specifically identifying more differences with cyber bullying. These are divided into four sub-themes: (1) cyber bullying is easier; (2) cyber bullying can be done anytime; (3) cyber bullying lasts forever; and (4) cyber bullies won’t get caught. Each of these will be explained.

**Sub-theme 1: Cyber bullying is easy.** Technology has grown fast and furiously over the past decade and is becoming more available to our youth. This has presented a new, and somewhat unmonitored way, for youth to communicate. Eleven of the 28 participants indicated that cyber bullying is far easier than traditional bullying. Student 149 believes “cyber bullies have to use much less effort and can be more impulsive. It allows bullies to avoid facing their victims so it requires less courage.” Student 4 adds, “cyber bullying is easier to do because it’s easier to hide behind your computer than to

say something to someone's face." Student 4 brings up the concept of anonymity and "hiding" using the student's word, provides an easier avenue to engage in cyber bullying. Student 116 takes this concept a step further when he/she reflected,

When bullying over the Internet, people are more persistent to keep bullying because they can't see the victim's reaction. When not seeing the victim's reaction, cyber bullies continue the bullying because there is no way for them to feel guilty, like in traditional bullying, you can see whether the victim cries or becomes sad and then guilt builds in and it usually stops.

Student 92 also believes the ability to hide makes cyber bullying much easier. This student commented with "cyber bullying you can hide behind a keyboard, you can say anything when you're not in front of the person you are bullying." Student 53 responded, "cyber bullying is online and people can hide behind usernames and it's easier to leave a comment on someone's page than to actually call them in real life."

Whether it is the fact that it is easier to say mean things online than face to face or if it is the sense of safety felt when hiding behind a computer screen; students see cyber bullying as simply an easier behavior than that of traditional bullying.

**Sub-theme two: Cyber bullying can be done at any time.** Adolescents have access to technology at any time and virtually anywhere. This contributes to the second sub-theme differentiating cyber bullying from traditional bullying and that is cyber bullying can happen at any time. Student 19 indicated, "cyber bullying can be done at any time. With all the social networking people have access to these days, there's no

limit to the ways someone can be cyber bullied.” Student 3 recognized this by suggesting:

with traditional bullying you could come home and feel safe from the entire name calling at school but cyber bullying takes it to home, also is much harsh because everyone can see it and chime in on the act and won’t do anything.

**Sub-theme three: Cyber bullying lasts forever.** There is a saying that nothing is ever really deleted when online and students speak to this as another specific difference between cyber bullying and traditional bullying. Student 1 says with, “cyber bullying everyone sees it and it is stuck on the Internet and technology forever. Kids want their friends to see what they are saying on Facebook and Twitter some they get likes, favorites and retweets.” This is an example of how quickly something can spread online and the more it spreads the less likely it will ever get completely deleted. Student 92 recognizes, “when it is online you can never take it back anyone can go and see it so more people know about it and can read it.”

**Sub-theme four: Cyber bullies cannot be caught.** Given the fact that many students feel cyber bullying is easy because you can hide and that there is such a larger online world, it is no wonder they believe a cyber bully cannot be caught, nor prevented. Student 12 believes, “traditional bullying can be prevented most of the times, while cyber bullying can’t.” Student 53 answered, “people can hide behind usernames and most likely will not get caught” where Student 2 took the stance that, “people are becoming more scared to bully so they do it behind a screen.” Student 134 unequivocally stated, “kids in this generation chooses to bully online is because teenagers tend to think

bullying online isn't really and they could not get in trouble." It appears that adolescents still have a sense online that there are no ways to get caught when engaging in bullying behaviors towards others.

## **Theme Two: Which is Worse? There Is No Clear Answer**

Another finding was that 14 out of 29 students indicated that a difference between traditional and cyber bullying is that one is worse than the other. The students were split right down the middle with seven participants indicating traditional bullying is worse and seven indicating that cyber bullying is worse. Table 5 shows those results as well as whether or not those students taking a side had ever fallen victim to either traditional or cyber bullying.

In addition to indicating the students who believe traditional or cyber bullying is worse the student comments as to what makes them believe that is also included. For example, students who reported that traditional bullying is worse, often referenced the word violence. They reported traditional bullying caused emotional and physical pain and being a victim of this can become very embarrassing as it happens in front of others. Those who felt cyber bullying was worse focused more on the emotional and mental pain. They included words such as "hurtful," "cruel," and "persistent." Student 12 summed it up best when reporting, "cyber scars never go away like bruises."

The table also reports whether or not the student had ever been a victim of either traditional or cyber bullying, as often times students will create a belief based on past experiences. Data in this study indicated there was no difference between those who said

Table 5

## Students Report on Whether Traditional or Cyber Bullying is Worse

Traditional Bullying is worse because...	Victim of Traditional Bullying	Victim of Cyber Bullying
Student 6: it can be both emotional and physical	X	X
Student 7: it can get violent easily		
Student 17: if you do this in front of everybody, that's embarrassing		
Student 21: it is in your face and you can really get hurt		X
Student 24: it can hurt people worse, physical violence is much worse than verbal	X	X
Student 53: if someone verbally harasses you and may even physically hurt you	X	
Student 81: it is more common		
Student 163: it gets embarrassing	X	X
Cyber bullying is worse because...		
Student 12: cyber scars never go away like bruises		
Student 19: it has become much more common		
Student 45: I see it more every day when I go to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or any other social media	X	X
Student 75: it hurts physically, mentally, emotionally		X
Student 92: it is more hurtful	X	X
Student 116: it is more cruel and persistent	X	X
Student 142: you can't escape it and pictures and messages spread very easily and quickly	X	

cyber bullying or traditional bullying is worse and whether or not they were victims of either cyber or traditional bullying. In the case of the students who believe traditional

bullying is worse, one student was a victim of traditional bullying only, one a victim of cyber bullying only, three of the students had reported being a victim of both traditional and cyber bullying, and two reported never falling victim to either. With the students who indicated cyber bullying was worse, the results were exactly the same.

### **Research Question Two**

The second research question looks at the students' understanding of their pathway in becoming a cyber bully. To answer this question, themes from both the six paragraph artifact and the journal writing were analyzed. The students' overall understanding of their pathway in becoming a cyber bully was expressed around the following two themes: (1) entertainment, and (2) revenge/payback. There was also a third theme that was emerging—loyalty/protection of a friend. There were only four students whose journey to cyber bullying began down this pathway, so it is worth including as an emergent theme. Each of these themes, with the number of students who expressed an understanding within each theme is summarized in Table 6 and will be discussed in further detail.

#### **Theme One: Entertainment**

The first theme, which was evident with 44.8% of the student sample, was entertainment. Entertainment in regard to this study represents students who simply witness drama unfolding on a social networking site and cannot help but become involved in it. This is the beginning of their cyber bully journey as the students seem to



Table 6

## Thematic Categories of Student Pathways to Cyber Bullying

Theme	Number of Students
Entertainment	13
Revenge/Payback	12
Emergent Theme	Number of Students
Loyalty/Protection of a friend	4

become so entertained they continue the journey. One type of drama that unfolds online is arguments between two different individuals. Student 1 explained the experience like this:

A time I liked or retweeted a negative comment was a long time ago on twitter. So there was this girl and this boy I was following and one day they were arguing and there was a lot of retweets and favorites on both sides and I decided to favorite and retweet from both sides. Then they decided to fight her brother and the boy and I saw a video and I liked it and some comments then there came pictures and raps about the two so I thought some of the stuff was funny, it really was.

Student 75 shared, “when arguments are big, and you agree with one side, you just without thinking like/retweet/make a status. But, when its online more people start to post things, and it gets nasty.” Student 149 shared this experience:

I have posted a comment on facebook that was negative about someone else. It all started over a summer fight, the reason these two girls were going to fight was because of a tweet one of the girls tweeted on twitter. So they fought and the fight traveled from someone's phone, to youtube, to facebook. So I saw the fight on facebook and I gave a negative comment to the girl that lost, which made her feel bad.

Another example of how students are entertained online to the point of engaging in cyber bullying activity is finding humor in other individual's posts about another.

Student 4 explains the experience below:

I've never directly posted a negative comment online about someone else, however, I have retweeted comments. I spend most of my time on twitter and tumblr. Constantly, I see negative comments about people I don't even know. I saw these comments about people I didn't even know and passed them along thinking they were funny. When you see a comment, or post, or tweet about someone else, you don't even think about the person, you only think about how funny you found the comment.

Student 26 shared, "one day I was on twitter and I saw this funny tweet about a person and I thought it was very funny so I retweeted it and favorite it. Everyone saw the tweet calling her a skank ass bitch." Student 116 wrote, "I have liked a mean status before. It was a rumor going around about someone and it was really funny. I liked it and I thought it was all funny at first even though I didn't have a problem with the victim." Finally, Student 163's experience was, "I was on twitter and as usual I was tweeting, and I went to the home page and there was a tweet about this girl that I knew.

This post/tweet wasn't nice at all, but the stuff it said was true so I thought I would retweet because I retweet tweets that is true.”

The last type of entertainment described by Student 53 is one of online games found on social networking sites. His experience is shared below.

There was this thing on Facebook and its where you answered questions about your friends. Some questions were simple like: does the person like the color blue? Some were a bit disturbing like: do you think this person watches porn? I'm not into Facebook games, but this game kept giving me notifications to play it or some of my friends were answering questions about me.

This particular student went on to explain how weird it felt answering questions. These answers get posted on the individual's site for all to see. It becomes addicting to students and puts personal negative information online about others.

### **Theme Two: Revenge/Payback**

Twelve of the 29 students' online bullying experience was related to revenge. Student 7 indicated it was done because she had been a victim of ongoing bullying in middle school. Student 81 in more detail shared:

One time when my used to be best friend started spreading rumors about me, I posted saying she's the worst person ever. Also, this girl posted saying bad things about her friend and I liked and commented back. I told her that's exactly how I feel too and we just started talking how bad they are, our old friends.

Student 92 is a little more to the point by sharing:

I have retweeted something about someone and it was mean but they do it to other people and by the way she actually kind of deserves it because people warned her and tell her what she is doing to herself but she says they are always going to hate.

Student 135 emphatically shares:

This is kind of a normal thing to me, but only when I don't like the person or I know it's true. I don't do it to hurt the person's feelings. If I don't like a person, everything they do annoys me. I retweet a lot of things that are said about people, mainly because its true or because I don't like them.

The theme of revenge/payback can take on different faces. Whether it is do unto you as you have done onto me, or simply the fact that the student does not like the other person, the students who take this pathway seem very confident in their choice to engage in this negative online behavior and seem justified in doing so.

### **Emerging Theme: Loyalty/Protection of Friend**

While this theme had the fewest number of students it was worth mentioning as their experiences seemed very personal. For example, Student 12 shared an experience of a friend who was being stalked by another person and comments were posted online about his friend being gay and annoying. So Student 12's friend posted mean messages and a photo and Student 12 liked it. In Student 12's words, "I love my friend." Student 45 explains her experience in more detail shared below:

There was this group of girls aiming for my friend and just picking on her a lot. So as a friend, I got involved. I “helped” out my friend by posting negative comments about those girls. Some people joined in and commented with me. The group of girls eventually stopped.

This loyalty can also get very negative and personal as shared by Student 137:

This event was basically a fight. It was between one of my close friends and an enemy. So my friend ended up posting negative comments about this person on facebook. One of the comments included hate, curse words, and racial slurs. I ended up liking this comment.

Whether it is pure entertainment, revenge, or loyalty these students have used one of these three pathways in beginning their personal journey in becoming a cyber bully.

### **Research Question Three**

Research question three looks at the student’s experience in being a cyber bully and how they felt about being involved in this behavior. In order to answer this question I analyzed both the six paragraph artifact and the journal writing, as with question two. In my analysis, the themes that emerged were in direct relation to the themes that emerged with question two. To present the themes for this section, I will be presenting them as sub-themes to the themes that emerged from research question two. Table 7 presents the findings.

Table 7  
Sub-Themes by Thematic Pathway

Theme		Total Students
Entertainment		13
Sub-theme 1	Funny then regret	6
Sub-theme 2	Regret but true	2
Sub-theme 3	Indifference/Joking	3
Sub-theme 4	Grew then regret	2
Revenge/Payback		12
Sub-theme 1	Feel nothing	6
Sub-theme 2	Joking then regret	2
Sub-theme 3	Power then regret	3
Loyalty/Protection of friend		4
Sub-theme 1	Indifference	2
Sub-theme 2	Good and bad	1
Sub-theme 3	Regret/knew better	1

**Theme: Entertainment**

This theme involved students who began to bully online for pure entertainment purposes. This could have included taking part in online arguments occurring between two individuals or groups of individuals, finding others rude and/or negative comments funny so they participated, or played online games through social networking sites which

has the potential to become very hurtful to others. Students who took this pathway had one of four possible experiences or feelings about their behavior. The sub-themes are shared below.

**Sub-theme 1: Funny then regret.** Students who experienced these feelings tended to participate without initially thinking about the consequences of getting involved. For example, student one stated, “I thought some of the stuff was funny, it really was, but then I knew it was wrong and the girl had a bad rep for a while.” Student 3 shared, “At the time it was very funny but like after it was done I felt bad about doing it so I stopped” where student 4 said, “you don’t even think about the person, you only think about how funny you found the comment. It’s not something I am proud of, but I can’t change the past.”

**Sub-theme 2: Regret but true.** With this experience the students seem to feel a sense of regret. However, because they believe the negative comments to be true it seems to justify their feeling of regret. Student 2 summarizes feelings by indicating:

I liked a comment calling a girl a slut but it was about a girl who has been around. It was true but it was mean and I regret doing it because the girl became depressed from all the torment.

Student 163 explains a similar experience when reporting, “the post was not nice at all but the stuff it said was true. I know it wasn’t the right thing to do but I retweet tweets that is true.”

**Sub-theme 3: Indifference/joking.** With this experience students report really feeling nothing at all about engaging in the online bullying and in fact still feel it is simply a joke. Student 19 shared:

I liked it because I didn't think it would be a big deal. It was just a small joke, nothing seriously hurtful. Doing this, I really didn't think much about it, it was just a harmless joke. I realize now the person it was about could have taken it negatively.

Student 21 indicated, "after liking the negative comment I did not feel anything and thought the whole thing was funny" where Student 53 "didn't feel bad or good."

**Sub-theme 4: Grows then regret.** Students who experience this feeling watch how their participation in the online bullying grew larger than what they anticipated which led them to feelings of regret. Student 75 explained the experience by sharing:

When arguments are big, and you agree with one side you without thinking like a mean status. But, when its online more people start to post things, and it gets nasty, and then you regret ever setting any status or reposting or liking it in the first place.

Student 103 reported something similar in that, "I did it because it was funny but I found out that it can add you to the problem" which caused this student regret.

### **Theme: Revenge/Payback**

This pathway theme is one where students begin to bully online because they are getting back at someone whom they felt they were wronged by or they simply do not like another person so they engage in this negative behavior. Within this pathway the students experienced one of three reactions to their involvement in the behavior. Those sub-themes are discussed below.



**Sub-theme 1: Feel nothing.** Simply put students with this experience feel absolutely nothing about their involvement with cyber bullying. Student 7 claimed, “it was for payback, it really didn’t make me feel like anything,” where Student 135 said, “this is kind of a normal thing to me.” Student 142 added, “I didn’t like the girl being talked about. I didn’t really feel anything when I liked the post.” Student 155 shared a little more detail when reporting, “Why did I do it? Because I did not like the person at that time so I liked the status and didn’t think about it besides I liked how she would think aint nobody on her side.”

**Sub-theme 2: Joking then regret.** The students feeling this tend to start participating in the online bullying as a joke or to fit in with others who find something funny but eventually end up regretting their behavior. Student 17 reported, “If it was one of my facebook friends I think it was just joking. At the time I thought nothing would happen. But, I realized it hurts so bad and it made me feel bad.” Student 92’s experience included, “At the time I didn’t care, I thought it was joking, but now that I look back in time I would have changed it.”

**Sub-theme 3: Power then regret.** Students who experience this feeling tend to initially feel good and powerful in comparison to their victim, but after time a sense of regret sets in. Student 159 shared:

There was a time when I have tweeted about someone and after I posted my tweet it made me feel good because I felt that it’s what they deserved.

At the time it felt good because many people was going to see it that the person knew but after a while I felt very bad.

Student 134 had a conflict with another student and said some rude things about the other student on Facebook. Student 134 explained, “I said some rude things I wish I could take back. It made me feel powerful in the beginning but later I felt bad.” Student 170 simply said, “I felt good and better because I got him back but later on I felt a tiny bit bad and guilty.”

### **Emerging Theme: Loyalty/Protection of a Friend**

Students whose pathway to cyber bullying started because of loyalty to a friend experienced three different types of feelings through their experience. While this group of students was the smallest group, the sub-themes were evident and are discussed below.

**Sub-theme 1: Indifferent.** Students who experience no feelings about their online behaviors tend to believe this way because they are doing the right thing by protecting their friend or believe it is not any worse than what is being done to them. Student 24 stated, “On many occasions I have stuck up for my friends or family on Facebook. I did not feel bad and it didn’t compare to half the things being done to me” where Student 12 said simply, “now that I think about it, it didn’t really make a difference.”

**Sub-theme 2: Good and bad.** Students here experience a good feeling because of the protection they are providing their friend but feel bad about how what they have chosen to do online hurts someone else. Student 45 explained the experience below:

It made me feel good I was able to help my friend out, but I felt bad at the same time. I felt bad because I called them out. Some might

say I was right to do that, but I called them out when they didn't do anything to me.

**Sub-theme 3: Regret/knew better.** The student who experienced this feeling started with good intentions but quickly realized that it was wrong. Student 137 shared, "I ended up liking this comment, but today I regret it. How this made me feel was horrible. It hurts to see bullying, so why would I do it?"

### **Similarities and Differences**

The findings related to experiences in this study showed some similarities and differences between the sub-themes within the themes. The most glaring similarity was that in all pathways some students felt a sense of regret with their actions. In the pathway of entertainment three of the four experiences students' felt included regret (10) where those who engaged in cyber bullying due to revenge, two of the three experiences included a feeling of regret (5). In addition, most of the experiences that included regret did not initially begin with that feeling. Instead, some students in both pathways first thought their bullying was funny (8), it was only after time that regret began to set in. For the small number of students who engaged in the cyber bullying with the intent to protect a friend also experienced regret. In their case, the regret existed right from the onset because the student knew better than to engage in that type of behavior. Another similarity that existed between the sub-themes is that in each pathway students experienced a sense of indifference (11). The largest group who experienced this was those in the pathway of revenge. This makes sense due to the fact they believe their actions to be justified because of what had been done to them in the past, either by their

victim or another. A sense of indifference was also experienced by those in the other two pathways, but to a much smaller degree with only five students reporting indifference.

There were also some glaring differences with the sub-themes. Those in the pathway of entertainment were the only students to recognize that their actions quickly blossomed into a large number of participants. While these students ended up with a sense of regret, similar to the other pathways, they were the only students to get to that feeling by seeing how their actions grew into something they viewed out of control. Within the pathway of revenge the experience of power was reported. Again, with students who experienced this, they ended up feeling a sense of regret, but in no other pathway was the word power used. Finally, in the emerging theme of loyalty, there was a sense of right versus wrong that did not exist in the other two pathways. While the number of students who reported the protection of a friend to be their pathway in becoming a cyber bully, half of them knew their actions were wrong.

#### **Research Question Four**

The fourth research question asks how cyber bullies view the victim receiving the bullying online. For this particular question I analyzed the online photo story artifact. In this assignment, students were directed to create what looks like a comic strip, creating text and pictures to tell a story. The story they were to tell was of an experience they had cyber bullying via a social networking site and one specific slide had to include how they viewed the victim receiving the message. While this sample includes 29 students, five of the students failed to accurately follow the directions for the assignment. Therefore, those photo stories will not be included in the analysis. Table 8 represents the three themes

which emerged from the 24 students who completed the assignment. The themes with specific student examples will be discussed in detail below the table.

Table 8  
Thematic Categories of Students' Perception of Victim

Theme	Number of Students
1. Sadness	17
2. Anger	4
3. Did not care	3
Incomplete Assignment	5

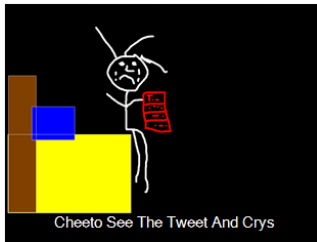
### Theme One: Sadness

Overwhelmingly, the students in this sample viewed the victim of the cyber bullying being very sad upon receiving it. Many of the students specifically addressed the fact that the victim was crying. Below are three examples of student responses:

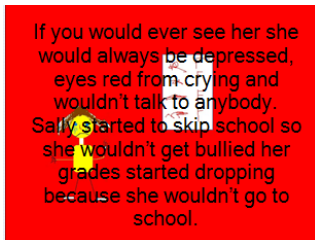
Student 1:



Student 26:



Student 2:



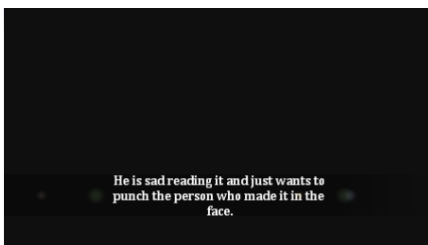
## Theme Two: Anger

Another response the cyber bully perceived the victim to feel was that of anger.

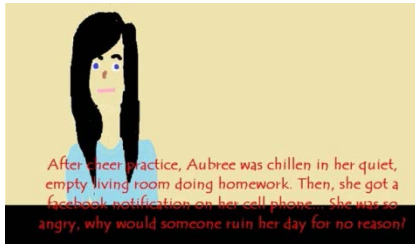
The victim, in the eyes of the cyber bully, was upset and ready for potential revenge.

Three student examples are shared below.

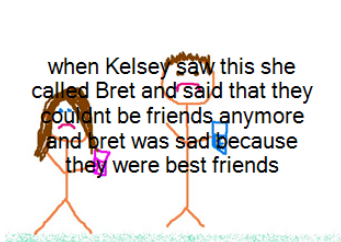
Student 3:



Student 75:



Student 92:



### Theme Three: Did Not Care

The last theme, while be it the least reported, is that the victim simply does not put any thought into the online bullying. In these cases it seems the victim chooses to simply ignore what is being sent to them and move on. Below are two student samples.

Student 4:



Student 116:



## Discussion

The initial findings of this research clearly show students have a sound understanding of the difference between traditional and cyber bullying. In addition, students seemed to be able to articulate some unique characteristics of cyber bullying in comparison to that of traditional bullying. Some of these included: it is easier, can be done at any time, it lasts forever and the bully cannot be caught. Interestingly, in reporting which type of bullying was worse, half reported traditional was worse where the other half indicated cyber bullying was worse.

In interpreting the data regarding the pathway a student takes in becoming a cyber bully it was clear that it was primarily due to either revenge/payback or for entertainment purposes. Students who were engaging in cyber bullying due to revenge had been wronged by another person and were able to get back at that person via online social networking sites. This supports the idea that cyber bullying is easier and takes less courage than to approach a person face to face. Students who began to cyber bully due to revenge experienced emotions such as power and regret to no feelings whatsoever.

Students who began to cyber bully due to entertainment simply had too much time on their hands. The accessibility of technology allowed them to fill their free time



with online searches and endless drama displayed on social networking sites. This drama became funny to them so they began to take sides and engage. Before they realized it, they were becoming the aggressor. Students that cyber bullied for entertainment reported feeling emotions such as regret to indifference. The interesting finding was those who felt regret also felt it was justifiable because what they were writing, in some cases, was the truth. This truth made their actions acceptable.

Lastly, there was another theme that was beginning to emerge as it related to the pathway a student takes in becoming a cyber bully. That emergent theme was loyalty. Students saw a friend being wronged and felt their friend needed help so they became the aggressor and protector. Students who were protecting their friend reported they knew better than to get involved. They also reported, however, that they felt good about protecting their friend.

The final interpretation from the data included a determination of how these new cyber bullies viewed their victims receiving their words and actions online. Interestingly, an overwhelming majority of students reported they felt the victims likely felt sad or angry. Real feelings were reported by many victims of both types of bullying. Yet, with this realization, the separation from the victim and seeing the response makes their actions much easier.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to capture the voices of ninth grade students who have never engaged in traditional face-to-face bullying, but have cyber bullied. This study focused on students in one school setting where an intentional

focus is placed on the topic of bullying through a lesson in a character education course. Students in this course complete a variety of assignments, four of which were used as data for this research. The pool of students began at 331 and was reduced, using inclusionary criteria and purposeful sampling, to 29. The artifacts completed by the 29 students were analyzed to produce the themes included in this chapter.

There were two main themes associated with research question one: how do students understand the difference between traditional bullying and cyber bullying? The two themes were: face to face versus the Internet and one type is worse than the other. There were several sub-themes associated with each theme as well.

Research questions two and three ended up relating to one another as themes began to emerge through analysis. Three themes arose from the data for question two: how do students understand the pathway that led them to become a cyber bully? These themes were: entertainment, revenge/payback, and loyalty/protection of a friend. Research question three had sub-themes that directly related to each of the themes for question two. Research question three asked: how do they experience being a cyber bully and how do they feel about being involved with this behavior? There were four sub-themes associated to entertainment and three sub-themes each associated with revenge/payback and loyalty/protection of a friend.

Three themes emerged for research question four: how does the student view the victim receiving the online bullying? These themes were drawn from the online photo stories created by the students. The themes included: sadness, anger, and did not care.

Chapter V will now summarize the major results of this study. It will also address the relationship of this study to other existing research in the area of cyber bullying and

any implications this study may have on policy and practice along with implications for potential future research.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

In Chapter I, I introduced the research study and provided rationale as to why this study should be conducted. Schools are being challenged today to incorporate technology in classrooms. This increasing use of technology can increase students' social interactions and enhance collaborative learning. However, it also brings problems that deserve our attention, including cyber bullying (Li, 2005). Adolescents are now using social media sites in large numbers with statistics from 2009 showing 73% of teens are using the sites, an increase from 18% from three years prior (Lenhart et al., 2010). In 2011, NCES reported eight percent of public schools reported that cyber bullying had occurred among students daily or at least once per week at or away from school and four percent of those reported that the school environment was affected by cyber bullying and that staff resources were allocated to the problem (Robers et al., 2012). The scarcity of information on the cyber bully, and the pathway of becoming one, drove this study as it is the sort of evidence school leaders will need if they are to successfully implement both prevention programs and policies to address this issue.

Given this ever growing problem with adolescents, I wanted to capture the voices of ninth grade students who have never engaged in traditional face to face bullying, but have cyber bullied, studying both the pathway and experiences behind the bullying. The study was framed around the overarching question: What do students reveal about their

path of becoming a cyber bully through artifacts as part of an instructional program taken in ninth grade? In addition to this question four sub-questions were developed:

1. How do students understand the difference between traditional bullying and cyber bullying?
2. How do students understand the pathway that led them to become a cyber bully?
3. How do they experience being a cyber bully and how do they feel about being involved with this behavior?
4. How does the student view the victim receiving the online bullying?

In Chapter II, I synthesized the literature on cyber bullying to establish justification for this study. The review of previous research focused on four aspects important to this study: (1) adolescent social development and aggression, (2) traditional and cyber bullying and its impact on its victims, (3) General Strain Theory and, (4) other potential influences on adolescents when deciding to bully online.

With adolescent social development there has been a great deal of evolution over the years. By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to present time researchers began looking at the adolescent period as more of a process-oriented time which involves relationships with others. It is a period where youth are increasingly relying on their friends for support and companionship and when their attention to their social reputation and popularity amongst their social groups increases (Shin & Ryan, 2012). The newest challenge for adolescents and their development is the Internet. Adolescents are now beginning to make decisions on what to disclose about themselves, real or not, to others via the Internet (Ahn, 2011b). In recent years, there are new forms of aggression based on technological communication, which has added to the traditional forms of adolescent violence (Calvete

et al., 2010). With the insufficient social cues available in cyber space, the potential is present for adolescents to develop a blatant disregard for others, influencing them to become cyber bullies.

Bullying has long been a concern among parents, educators, and students (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010a). Traditional bullying, which is defined as repeated aggressive behavior in which there is an imbalance of power, has been studied extensively, internationally and culturally (Kowalksi & Limber, 2007; Li, 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Shariff, 2004). Cyber bullying is defined as willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Williams & Guerra, 2007). Cyber bullying represents a unique phenomenon that creates lasting memories to the victims, yet we still have a lot to learn about it (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011). Almost 30% of adolescents reported they were victims of online bullying, but unfortunately this topic is so new and difficult to monitor, empirical research has yet to confidently determine if online bullying results in the same types of feelings for the victims that traditional bullying creates (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Sontag et al., 2011). Cyber bullying has raised concerns because its electronic nature makes it less likely to attract the attention of parents and school personnel (Hay & Meldrum, 2009).

The General Strain Theory has the potential to explain a broad range of adolescent delinquency. In 1992 Agnew broadened the focus of this theory to include relationships in which others present the individual with toxic or negative stimuli. This theory suggests there are three major types of strain which leads to delinquency: prevention of an individual from achieving positively valued goals; removal of, or the threat to remove, positively valued stimuli an individual already possesses; or the

presentation of, or threat of the presentation of, toxic or negatively valued stimuli (Agnew, 1992). Patchin and Hinduja (2010c) reported that cyber bullying makes sense as a response to strain when considered within the context of GST. The feeling of strain begins to create pressure for corrective action so adolescents under strain begin to think they want to do something that will assist them in not feeling so bad and clearly bullying others is one such corrective action.

Other potential factors influencing adolescents to cyber bully discussed in Chapter II were anonymity and peer relations. Kowalski and Limber (2007) comment that one of the most compelling and arguably most dangerous aspects of the Internet is the fact it allows people to maintain anonymity. Where Henry et al., (2011) indicated that early adolescence is a critical transition period and increasing peer influence, a large part of this transition, has the potential to put adolescents at a higher risk for violence perpetration and victimization.

Research findings have resulted in bringing this fairly new, and definitely detrimental, phenomenon to light. The negative impacts it is having on youth range from death to the impacts on social development and the inability for victims to learn or feel safe at school. This study contributes to the literature by providing a qualitative analysis of ninth grade student experiences when choosing to cyber bully.

Chapter III provided an explanation of the research methodology. This was a qualitative transcendental phenomenological analysis. This design was selected because it served my purpose of the study which was to capture the voices of ninth grade students who have never engaged in bullying face to face but have cyber bullied. Through artifacts obtained from a character education class all ninth grade students take at the

selected site, I analyzed the data by reducing the information to significant statements, combining them into themes and sub-themes allowing me to convey the overall essence of their experiences. These themes and sub-themes were organized and then described in Chapter IV.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

The summary of my findings presented in this study are based on the information provided by 29 ninth grade students attending school at the selected site who participated in the lesson on bullying in the required character education class. The students represented both male (11) and female (18) students with nine students in the study being White and 20 students minority. Detailed demographic information in respect to the original pool of candidates and the sample for this study is presented in Tables 1 and 3 within Chapter IV.

#### **Key Findings Related to Research Question One**

How do students understand the difference between traditional bullying and cyber bullying? In the analysis of the six paragraph artifact the finding emerged that every student understands the fundamental difference between the two types of bullying: traditional bullying is done face-to-face in some type of public setting while cyber bullying occurs online. The students also added more differences between the two including that cyber bullying is easy, can be done anytime, lasts forever, and cyber bullies cannot be caught.



Students who indicated that cyber bullying is easy described this as meaning it takes much less effort to participate in the act. Students are more impulsive, it does not have to be something you necessarily have to plan out, as you might with traditional bullying. They often used the word “hide” in their writing implying that it is much easier to say hurtful mean words when hiding behind a keyboard or computer screen. It requires less courage and there is a greater sense of security when bullying online.

The findings also showed that students have a true understanding of there being no barriers to when you can cyber bully. They clearly understand that face to face bullying has a limitation; the victim goes home at some point. With the access to technology, the victim is available to the bully 24 hours a day, seven days a week if desired. A majority of students today carry a computer in their pockets, called a smart phone, and can access social networking sites through those at any time. In their words, there simply are no limits anymore.

The data also suggested that students perceive cyber bullying lasts forever. With traditional bullying, bruises go away, but with online bullying the words or pictures can, and often do, last forever. They indicate that everyone sees the bullying and realize that it can be saved and passed on to others beyond their imaginations. There are many more bystanders with cyber bullying and those bystanders can make sure it lasts, even when the bully realizes it needs to stop.

The final difference found in this study is students believe cyber bullies cannot be caught. It is easy to catch and punish a traditional bully, even though it does not mean it always stops the act. With cyber bullying, however, there is this sense that it cannot be prevented and it is much more difficult to get caught. Students believe that cyber

bullying is not something a school will really get involved with. The ability for youth to hide behind usernames makes it more cumbersome for schools to even try to investigate.

### **Key Findings Related to Research Questions Two and Three: A Revision of the Conceptual Framework**

In Chapter I, I presented the conceptual framework that explained my initial assumptions of how an adolescent who has never engaged in face to face bullying becomes a cyber bully. This is represented in Figure 1 on page 14. It showed that all students go through a period of social development and using the General Strain Theory as the theoretical framework, strain may cause an adolescent to become a traditional and/or cyber bully. These adolescents then are presented with an increase in technology available to them along with a proliferation of social networking sites. The traditional bully, given this technology, also becomes a cyber bully, extending his/her reaches beyond the schoolyard. Students who had never bullied traditionally, after being presented with technology and the proliferation of social networking sites experienced three additional influences. These influences included: easy access to technology, the anonymity provided by this technology, and peer relations. These three influences worked together influencing the adolescent to become the new cyber bully. The study was conducted to specifically learn more about the pathway of this new cyber bully from their own lived experiences.

The findings of this research revised the pathway an adolescent who has never bullied face to face but has cyber bullied takes in their journey. The data analyzed for the new pathways included both the journal writings and six paragraph paper and were

analyzed by answering research questions two and three. These results are graphically represented in Figure 2.

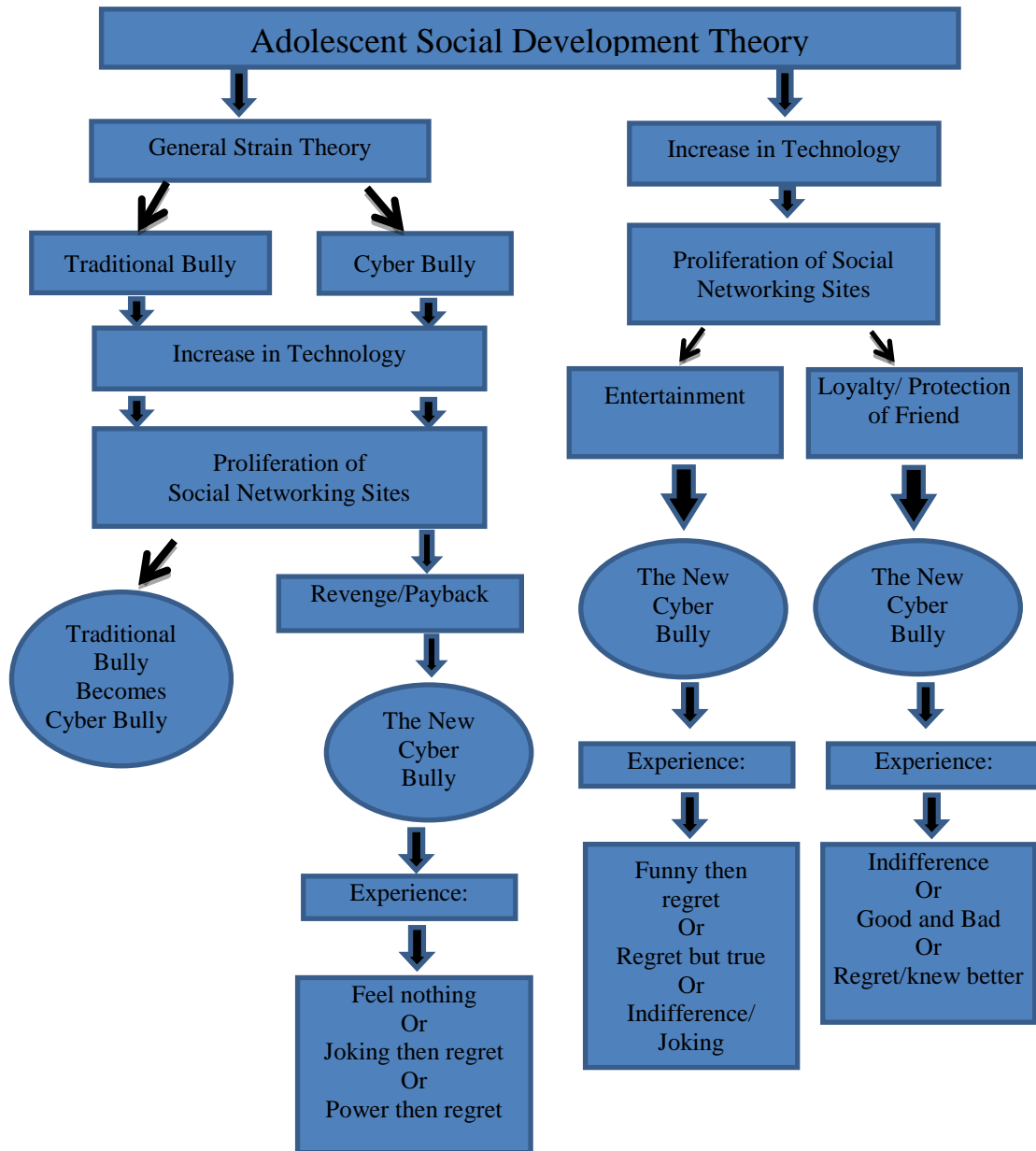


Figure 2. Revised Conceptual Framework for Sideman's (2013) Study.

Data gathered through my study suggest there are three pathways a student may take in becoming a cyber bully. The revised conceptual framework in Figure 2 shows the three pathways. The left side of the framework relates specifically to the theoretical framework used in this study, GST, which suggests that adolescents who experience negative stimuli may try to seek revenge against the source of it. In the student artifacts analyzed, 12 of the 29 students indicated that revenge or payback was the reason they began to engage in cyber bullying. Some examples of these negative stimuli included being a victim of ongoing bullying in previous years, students bullying others online causing negative feelings, or simply a person who becomes an annoyance. In any case, the students who began to engage in cyber bullying because of revenge did so after being presented with negative relations with others. This finding supported the initial conceptual framework presented in Chapter I.

Data showed the students who did engage in cyber bullying because of revenge had one of three experiences when doing so: they simply felt nothing; the student initially thought it was funny but then regret set in, or a few felt a sense of power over their victim but then again a sense of regret set in. Students who felt nothing summed it up by simply implying the other person deserved it and, in fact, they felt some pleasure about the fact others agreed with them making the victim feel worse. There was a real sense of justification by these students who comprised half of this group. Those who thought it was funny explained initially they went after another person because it was deserved and, in their words, thought what they wrote would help them fit in with other peers. Those who felt powerful when they began to cyber bully due to strain indicated it felt good because the victim was getting what they deserved, and for once they felt they

had the upper hand. Those students who felt it was funny or those who felt it brought a sense of power ended up feeling a sense of regret. In both cases, the students indicated that it was the wrong thing to do and they, in fact, began to realize how the other person must have felt having been in those shoes themselves.

The right hand side of the new conceptual framework was not originally included in the first framework and added two different pathways a student may journey in becoming a cyber bully, neither relating to GST. The data in this study still supports the fact that all adolescents go through a transitional period of social development and are surrounded with both an increase in technology and a proliferation of social networking sites. It is at this point data showed some students begin to cyber bully but not because of strain. The other two pathways included entertainment and loyalty and are described in more detail below.

**Entertainment.** This group of students, which included 13 of the 29 involved in this study, seemed to simply have too much time on their hands. These adolescents began their journey towards cyber bullying for pure social and entertainment reasons. It was as simple as seeing an argument start on a social networking site and taking sides, becoming very mean and aggressive to one of the two involved. A second example was watching a link on a site where someone uploaded a video of a fight, and again, the student became involved by commenting very negatively about the student who lost. Another source of entertainment was reading the comments/posts by another that were very mean, but seen as funny, and the students decided to get in on the fun. The final example given by the students, through their coursework, was the entertainment that social network games provide. These games often ask you to answer questions about

another “friend” on the site and these questions get very personal, often inappropriate for students this age, and these answers get posted online. In any of these cases, students used words such as “funny,” “addictive,” and “without thought” when talking about their experience.

Students who begin their journey in becoming a cyber bully through the purpose of entertainment tended to have one of four experiences. Three of the four experiences either started or ended with a feeling of regret. One experience included an initial feeling of fun and humor then regret. Students who experienced this described it as a desire to participate initially, without really thinking about what they were doing, or about the consequences of their actions. Once they took the time to think about it, the regret set in. Interestingly, the next time they saw something funny the same pattern continued. A second experience was an initial feeling of nothing but the bully began to see it grow and spread then regret set in. This group of adolescents again participated in the drama but their cyber bullying grew larger than they anticipated and the new cyber bully soon realized they were adding to the problem, which was when the regret set in. A third experience was that some students reported feeling an initial sense of regret but were able to justify their actions because what they put online, in their mind, was true. The final experience with the cyber bullies involved for entertainment purposes was that of pure indifference. Their involvement in the online bullying did not impact them, and in fact, they saw their actions as nothing seriously hurtful.

**Loyalty/Protection of friend.** The final pathway adolescents took in becoming a new cyber bully, according to the analysis of their student artifacts, was one of loyalty. This was the smallest group, which only involved four of the 29 students in the study but

the experiences were clear and personal so warranted being included in the results. Students whose pathway began because of loyalty primarily began bullying another online to protect a friend. They mentioned experiences of a friend being bullied, stalked, or having mean/inappropriate pictures and messages posted about them. In their mind, they needed to come to the rescue of their friend and the way they felt they could help was to begin to participate in online bullying themselves. This did not fall under the General Strain Theory because while there certainly was a negative stimulus involved it was not direct. In other words, the strain was being experienced by someone else, and the new cyber bully was rescuing their friend whom they felt could not protect him/herself.

Students engaging in cyber bullying due to loyalty had one of three experiences: indifference, a feeling of good and bad, or a sense of regret. Students who felt indifferent about their actions felt that way because they were doing the right thing by protecting their friend. They believed their actions online were not any worse than those of their victim so it was justifiable. Students who felt a sense of both good and bad were conflicted. They felt good because they were helping their friend and their friend was evidently very appreciative. On the other hand, they felt bad because they were interjecting themselves in a hurtful situation when not having any personal conflict with their victim. They knew that was wrong. The last experience one student explained was a sense of immediate regret. This particular student instinctively protected a friend by beginning to bully another online but all the while knew her behavior was wrong and never had a good feeling about her actions.

## **Key Findings Related to Research Question Four**

How do students view the victim receiving the bullying online? The findings for this research question were analyzed by studying an online artifact the students created. In this particular assignment, students were instructed to create a comic strip using an online program. The comic had to be six slides in length and one of the slides required students to show how they perceived the victim receiving the information. Students reported, overwhelmingly, that students were sad. In many cases, the sadness was depicted with pictures of the victim with tears in their eyes. While there were 29 students in the sample for this study, five of the 29 failed to complete the assignment correctly so those artifacts were not included in the analysis. With the 24 that were analyzed, 17 reported the victim experiencing sadness upon receiving it.

The other two responses students' perceived the victim experiencing was anger (4) and disregard (3). With anger, students used pictures and texts that included potential revenge, a question of why, and a response of defriending the perpetrator. For those that believed the victim simply did not care, students showed the victim responses as ignoring the words, putting no thought into it, or the victim thinking it was possibly a mistake.

The findings indicated that the new cyber bullies do have a realistic understanding that their actions are going to cause emotional responses, such as sadness and anger. The concern is that perceiving this did not stop their involvement, which made me believe "out of sight out of mind" comes into play with cyber bullying. As indicated in earlier findings, being a cyber bully takes much less courage and given these findings it is because the cyber bully does not have to witness the victim's real reaction.



## Relationship of Key Findings to Previous Research

Chapter II focused on a synthesis of literature about adolescent social development, bullying in both the traditional and cyber sense, General Strain Theory, and other potential influences on cyber bullying, including anonymity and peer relations. My study contributes to this body of research, especially in regard to shedding light on the pathway adolescents who have never bullied in the traditional sense take in becoming a cyber bully. Furthermore, my study adds new findings in the influences of what makes a non-bullying adolescent become a cyber bully and their emotional experience when doing so. The comparison between key findings of this study and previous research are summarized in Table 9 and will be developed and discussed in the pages that follow.

Table 9

### Comparison Summary between Siderman (2013) and Previous Research

Key Findings (Siderman, 2013)	Previous Research
<b>Students definition of differences between traditional bullying and cyber bullying</b>	Affirms:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Traditional bullying is face to face in public and cyber bullying is online</li><li>▪ Cyber bullying is easy</li><li>▪ Cyber bullying can be done at any time</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Popular social networking sites has resulted in more opportunities to embarrass, harass, or upset others (Jones et al., 2013)</li><li>▪ Hundreds of socially interactive services cater to teens (Ahn, 2011a)</li><li>▪ Can occur any time and can be quickly distributed to a wide audience (Kowalski &amp; Limber, 2007)</li><li>▪ Enables bullies to extend aggression beyond physical to cyberspace where they can harass others day and night (Patchin &amp; Hinduja, 2006)</li></ul>

Table 9—Continued

Key Findings (Siderman, 2013)	Previous Research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cyber bullies cannot get caught</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ It seems much easier for youth to be cruel online because of physical separation; there are not any authorities policing online behaviors (Patchin &amp; Hinduja, 2010a)</li> <li>▪ Poor caregiver monitoring is implicated in increasing the odds an adolescent will harass online (Ybarra &amp; Mitchell, 2004)</li> <li>▪ There are questions of jurisdiction with schools when bullying is initiated off school grounds (Patchin &amp; Hinduja, 2011)</li> <li>▪ Cyber aggression is harmful behavior that provides adolescents with a number of advantages; it can occur anytime, spread quickly, and it can occur outside of school property making it difficult for adults to monitor and regulate (Sontag et al., 2010)</li> <li>▪ Cyberspace offers some degree of safety because hiding behind a computer screen frees adolescents from traditional constraints and social pressures (Calvete et al., 2010)</li> </ul> <p>Disputes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Anonymous nature of internet expands negative behavior (Anderson &amp; McCabe, 2012)</li> <li>▪ Cyber bullies can remain virtually anonymous and be shielded by screen names to protect identity (Patchin &amp; Hinduja, 2010; Wong-Lo &amp; Bullock, 2011)</li> </ul> <p>Adds to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Remoteness of online social interactions reduces adolescent inhibitions which might otherwise restrain youth (Jones et al., 2012)</li> <li>▪ Adolescents who make negative comments online would otherwise not make the in person due to the distance a computer provides (Christofides et al., 2012)</li> </ul>

Table 9—Continued

Key Findings (Sideman, 2013)	Previous Research
<b>Students' pathways and experiences in becoming a cyber bully</b>	<b>Affirms:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Entertainment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funny then regret</li> <li>• Regret but true</li> <li>• Indifferent/joking</li> <li>• Grows then regret</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Revenge/Payback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feel nothing</li> <li>• Joking then regret</li> <li>• Power then regret</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Loyalty/Protection of Friend <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indifferent</li> <li>• Good and bad</li> <li>• Regret/knew better</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Life in cyber space is often intertwined with life in the real world (Patchin &amp; Hinduja, 2006)</li> <li>▪ Cyber space equated to wild west where anything goes (Hoff &amp; Mitchell, 2009)</li> <li>▪ Last decade has seen significant changes in online activity and many peer relations, both good and bad, are moving online (Jones et al., 2013)</li> <li>▪ Cyber bullying most often occurs within the context of own social group (Mishna et al., 2009)</li> <li>▪ GST focuses on the inability of adolescents to escape legally from the negative stimuli may lead an adolescent to seek revenge against the source of it (Agnew, 1985)</li> <li>▪ Experiencing strain makes people feel bad so they want to do something that will assist them and bullying others is one such corrective action (Patchin &amp; Hinduja, 2010c)</li> <li>▪ Peer interactions arguably hold the greatest importance for individuals' social and behavioral functioning (Mikami et al., 2010)</li> <li>▪ Over one fourth of youth ages 12 to 14 had cyber bullied and did so because they did not like the person, the other person upset them, were bullied first, their friends did it so they did it, or it was simply just fun (Cassidy et al., 2009)</li> <li>▪ Youth who use cyber space to harass others put themselves in a position of power relative to victim (Patchin &amp; Hinduja, 2006)</li> </ul>

Table 9—Continued

Key Findings (Siderman, 2013)	Previous Research
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ With traditional bullying bystanders are usually only a handful but potential audience and involvement with bystanders online is limitless (Kowalski &amp; Limber, 2007)</li> </ul> <p>Disputes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Both cyber bullying and traditional bullying are rooted in aggression (Ybarra &amp; Mitchell, 2004)</li> <li>▪ Online bullying is associated with levels of distress (Jovonen &amp; Gross, 2008)</li> <li>▪ Umbrella of anonymity increases potential pool of adolescents whom might engage in bullying online (Kowalski et al., 2012)</li> <li>▪ Anonymity becomes a potential equalizer to this negative behavior (Li, 2007; Ybarra &amp; Mitchell, 2004)</li> </ul> <p>Adds to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ As teens increase Internet communication, interpersonal conflict is bound to occur (Wong-Lo &amp; Bullock, 2011)</li> <li>▪ Research conducted thus far primarily used quantitative methods and presented demographic statistics, frequencies and impact on victims (Devoe &amp; Bauer, 2010; Hoff &amp; Mitchell, 2009; Kowalski &amp; Limber, 2007; Patchin &amp; Hinduja, 2006)</li> <li>▪ It has been assumed cyber bullying is an extension of traditional bullying (Wong-Lo &amp; Bullock, 2011)</li> <li>▪ No study has yet attempted to identify causes and correlates of cyber bullying (Patchin &amp; Hinduja, 2010c)</li> <li>▪ It is important to discover if cyber bullies are youth who have never participated in traditional school based bullying (Patchin &amp; Hinduja, 2006)</li> </ul>

Table 9—Continued

Key Findings (Sideman, 2013)	Previous Research
<b>Cyber bullies view of victim receiving online bullying</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sadness</li> <li>▪ Anger</li> <li>▪ Did not care</li> </ul>	Adds to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Scholars are in agreement that higher levels of interpersonal misunderstandings and aggression are more likely to occur in interactions via the computer; with insufficient social cues available in cyberspace, the potential is present for adolescents to develop a blatant disregard for others (Ang et al., 2011)</li> <li>▪ The bully avoids having to witness the effects of cyber bullying where the victim experiences emotions such as anger, powerlessness, sadness and fear (Hoff &amp; Mitchell, 2009)</li> </ul>

### Findings Regarding Difference Between Traditional and Cyber Bullying

Findings from my study in regard to the differences between traditional and cyber bullying corroborate previous research, which indicated that traditional bullying is defined as repeated aggressive behavior in which there is an imbalance of power, has been studied extensively, internationally and culturally (Kowalksi & Limber, 2007; Li, 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Shariff, 2004) whereas cyber bullying is willful and repeated harm is inflicted through the medium of electronic text (Patchin & Hinduja, 2007; Williams & Guerra, 2007). For students in my study 100% of them recognized this basic difference.

Students also recognized additional differences with cyber bullying including the concept that cyber bullying is easy, can be done anytime, and bullies will not get caught. These findings are in line with Sontag et al. (2010) and Kowalski and Limber (2007) who

indicated cyber aggression is harmful behavior that provides adolescents with advantages; it can occur anytime, spread quickly, and it can occur outside of school property making it difficult for adults to monitor and regulate. Hundreds of socially interactive services cater to teens (Ahn, 2011a), which offers a degree of safety because hiding behind a computer screen frees adolescents from traditional constraints and social pressures (Calvete, et al., 2010). Students in this study used the word “hide” frequently in their writing. They clearly understood that a computer screen or keyboard does provide protection from having to witness the victim’s reaction making it much easier to engage. This affirms Patchin and Hinduja (2010a) who reported it seems much easier for youth to be cruel online because of physical separation.

Students were also very emphatic when they reported that there is no stopping point with cyber bullying. Technology allows the cyber bully to victimize any time and virtually anywhere. This also affirms previous research. Jones et al. (2013) wrote that popular social networking sites have resulted in more opportunities to embarrass, harass, or upset others. Cyberspace enables bullies to harass others day and night (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Poor caregiver monitoring is implicated in increasing the odds an adolescent will harass online (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Students in this study reported how easy the access to technology was for them, especially with smart phones in their pockets and computers in their classrooms.

There are questions of jurisdiction with schools when bullying is initiated off school grounds (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). According to Patchin and Hinduja (2010a) there are currently not any authorities policing online behaviors. Students in this study recognized this concept also. They believe a cyber bully will not be caught, they indicate

cyber bullying cannot be prevented because of that very fact. They intimate in their writings that it is too difficult and time consuming for adults to determine the perpetrator because of the ability for the cyber bully to hide behind usernames. In addition, students tend to believe that bullying online really isn't bullying so there will be no punishment. The online world is too big and ambiguous for students to be concerned about the thought of getting caught.

### **Findings Regarding Anonymity**

The findings of this study dispute some previous research as it relates to anonymity. Anderson and McCabe (2012) reported the anonymous nature of the Internet expands negative behavior. Cyber bullies can remain virtually anonymous and be shielded by screen names to protect identity (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010a; Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011). The students in this study refute this. While it is true that anyone can create a different or fake username or log on to someone else's social networking site, this is usually not the case. In this study, students knew their victim knew who they were. They run in similar social groups and were considered "friends" as it relates to the site Facebook or "followers" as it relates to the site Twitter. When students in this study referenced anonymity it was in the sense that they, as cyber bullies, could not see their victims when they were bullying online.

### **Findings Regarding a Cyber Bully's Pathway and Experiences**

When specifically looking at the pathway and experiences cyber bullies encounter in their journey, there are findings in my study that affirm previous research. Cassidy et

al. (2009) reported over one-fourth of youth ages 12 to 14 who had cyber bullied did so because they did not like the person, the other person upset them, were bullied first, their friends did it so they did it, or it was simply just fun. Cyber space can be equated with the Wild West where anything goes (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009) and that life in cyber space is often intertwined with life in the real world (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). The findings in this study supported all of these previous studies. Most often, students were bringing their real life experiences to social networking sites; whether this was based on a negative experience so the bully was seeking revenge or it was a real life argument playing itself out online, where the bully joined in for pure entertainment. The last decade has seen significant changes in online activity and many peer relations, both good and bad, are moving online (Jones et al., 2013). Students in this study reported how they would watch peers engage in an argument online, or they would watch posted videos of real world fights, entertaining them, and tempting them to become part of the drama. Interestingly, Mishna et al. (2009) reported cyber bullying often occurs within the context of one's own social group and the students in this study agree. They seemed to always know the victim(s). Many times they knew them as part of their peer group at school, and if not, they were at least "friends" on the social networking site; which usually takes permission being granted. Peer interactions arguably hold the greatest importance for individuals' social and behavior functioning (Mikami et al., 2010). Findings in this study support that concept. Students shared how they participated with the hope of fitting in with others, or bullied in order to support a peer. In either case, the relationship with a peer or peer group, fueled the decision for some adolescents to become a cyber bully.



One specific pathway a student takes in becoming a cyber bully is that of revenge. Twelve of the 29 students began engaging in bullying behavior via social networking sites to get back at someone that had irritated/hurt them. This affirms previous research as it relates to the General Strain Theory. GST focuses on the inability of adolescents to escape legally from the negative stimuli which may lead the adolescent to seek revenge against the source (Agnew, 1985). Experiencing strain makes people feel bad so they want to do something that will assist them and bullying others is one such corrective action (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010c). Students in this study who began to cyber bully for revenge/payback support these earlier studies. The students shared examples of seeking revenge against someone who had bullied them in the past, had spread rumors about them, or simply annoyed them. In any case, students who took this pathway did so because they had experienced some negative stimuli, causing strain, and their solution was to seek revenge online through cyber bullying.

Youth who use cyber space to harass others put themselves in a position of power relative to the victim (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Students who began to cyber bully online because of revenge report that being one of the experiences they felt when doing so. Some students in this study reported feeling a sense of initial power. They felt good because the victim deserved it and they knew many others would see the hateful words posted online. However, with traditional bullying bystanders are usually only a handful but the potential audience and involvement with bystanders online is limitless (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Many students, in various pathways, reported they eventually felt a sense of regret about their actions because of this very idea. In fact, the student's experience reported above ended up with him/her feeling a sense of regret because of the

realization of how many others saw the hateful post and began to comment on it. Others, especially in the pathway of entertainment, saw how the number of bystanders grew to a point where it got out of control, again bringing them a sense of regret for having involved themselves. They saw how what they started became very “nasty” and how in the end they had added to the problem by beginning to cyber bully in the first place.

The findings of this study disputes some previous research as it relates to the pathway and experiences of the cyber bullies. Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) reported both cyber bullying and traditional bullying are rooted in aggression; Jovenen and Gross (2008) added online bullying is associated with levels of distress. This study disputes that because 13 of the 29 students in this sample began to cyber bully for the simple purpose of fun and entertainment. They had no aggression when they logged onto their social networking site of preference. They simply logged on and read what others were saying, found others’ posts and behaviors humorous and decided to join in the fun. These students quickly crossed over from being a bystander to a perpetrator. Students that participated for fun often ended up feeling regret from their involvement. The study does support the idea that aggression and distress can be what influences involvement, evidenced by the pathways of revenge or the loyalty of protecting a friend. However, aggression or distress is not supported as the sole root.

### **Summary of Key Findings and How it Adds to Previous Research**

The findings in this study have served to affirm and in some cases dispute previous research on cyber bullying as discussed earlier. The findings have also added to previous research. Research conducted thus far primarily used quantitative methods and

presented demographic statistics, frequencies, and impact on victims (Devoe & Bauer, 2010; Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). No study has yet attempted to identify causes and correlates of cyber bullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010c). It is important to discover if cyber bullies are youth who have never participated in traditional school based bullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). This study adds to this research in a variety of ways. In the initial pool of potential candidates, the findings did show that a substantial number of students (146) have bullied traditionally and also cyber bully. These students have taken advantage of the fact their intimidation now reaches beyond the schoolyard. There are a group of students; though, that have bullied traditionally but do not cyber bully (65) and a group of students who have never bullied traditionally but have begun to cyber bully (51). It is this group in which the research was focused.

Another area where this study added to previous research is it took a qualitative approach to the phenomenon of cyber bullying. Instead of using quantitative tools, such as a survey, this study analyzed student class work and student experiences written in their own words, in an attempt to understand the pathway taken in becoming a cyber bully. This study was designed to collect data as the student participants go through lessons designed to capture the personal stories and understandings of ninth grade students relative to bullying. Through my participation with the teachers of the class we specifically shaped the questions and directions for activities to gather information critical to addressing the research questions through the transcendental approach. These activities allowed the students to describe their experiences through both the written word and the use of an online program allowing them to use pictures and captions to tell their

story. Through emergent theme analysis, I was able to ascertain that students who have never bullied traditionally but do cyber bully do so for entertainment, revenge, or protection of a friend.

Another area where the findings of this study add to previous literature is in relation to the remoteness the computer provides between the bully and the victim. The remoteness of online social interactions reduces adolescent inhibitions which might otherwise restrain youth (Jones et al., 2012). Christofides et al. (2012) stated adolescents who make negative comments online would otherwise not make them in person due to the distance a computer provides. The findings of this study add to these concepts. Students reported that bullying online is easy and takes much less courage. When detailing that concept they gave specific examples of how they do not have to see the reaction of the victim therefore making it easier to participate in the act. Scholars are in agreement that higher levels of interpersonal misunderstandings and aggression are more likely to occur in interactions via the computer with insufficient social cues available in cyberspace. The potential is present for adolescents to develop a blatant disregard for others (Ang et al., 2010). The cyber bully avoids having to witness the effects of cyber bullying where the victim experiences emotions such as anger, powerlessness, sadness and fear (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). This study affirms this previous research in that students fully understood how not having to witness the reaction of the victim when receiving the online bullying makes the act much easier and students were more willing to post hurtful, and in some cases, hateful words. The findings add to this research in that students, when having to share how they perceived the victim receiving the online bullying in all but two cases the bully perceived the student being sad or angry. They

clearly understood the emotional reactions the victim will feel as a result of the hurtful words, yet they still choose to participate in the act. Out of sight, out of mind, certainly comes into play for students in this study.

### **Implications for Policy, Practice, and Organization**

The changing landscape of education will most certainly continue to provide challenges to administrators, counselors, and teachers. As established in the review of literature there is little known about the cyber bully from his/her own words and cyber bullying and its impacts is not something that educators can ignore; yet, there are questions of jurisdiction when the bullying is initiated off school grounds. The reality for schools is they will need to create policies, and even more important, interventions, to address the issue of cyber bullying. Gaining perspective about the pathway an adolescent takes in becoming a cyber bully will be extremely helpful for various individuals.

Secondary administrators, guidance counselors, and teachers can use the information from this study to make more informed decisions on prevention initiatives. Examining the themes found from this study can provide insight as to what influences a student who has never bullied traditionally in becoming a cyber bully. First, understanding that some students choose to begin bullying online because they are protecting a friend relates specifically to coping skills. Secondary administrators can create opportunities, whether through a class, homeroom, or simply intermittent presentations to address coping skills. These opportunities can be intentional in making sure students have appropriate avenues to help their friend, besides becoming a cyber bully. Second, in relation to the pathway of protecting a friend, the school can address

policy and how students can silently or anonymously report a friend being bullied or mistreated. This will allow the administration or guidance counselor to intervene as the adult so the friend does not feel the need to defend their friend online.

Similarly, if we understand the pathway of revenge that influences an adolescent in becoming a cyber bully, school administrators can be more intentional in teaching coping skills. These coping skills might be different than those in the pathway of protecting a friend. During the adolescent years, grades six through nine, students start to become more independent and begin choosing to handle situations on their own. If adolescents were more equipped with how to handle conflict and difficult situations in a healthy way, they might never choose to become a cyber bully. If possible, it would be helpful to allow the students to practice with these coping skills as it may defer them from choosing to respond to negative stimuli with negative behavior of their own.

A third recommendation would be to assist and educate parents about online social networking sites. If parents understand the importance of being more actively involved in the online life of their adolescent it might serve to deter negative online behaviors. The pathway of entertainment, which close to half of the students took in this study, is extremely relative to parents. Students who began to cyber bully to have fun did so because they had nothing better to do with their time. They got online to keep themselves busy and after a while decided to become an active participant in the online bullying. It seemed these students did not get online with the intent of bullying, unlike those in the pathway of revenge or protection. Instead, this group of students had time on their hands and got caught up in drama. If parents were more aware of this pathway, and the hurtful and hateful words their child was posting, they may choose to be more active

in monitoring the amount of time young adolescents spend on social networking sites. Ironically, many of these sites require a minimum age of 16 to even participate.

The findings from this study also showed that many of the online bullies, regardless of pathway, experienced the feeling of regret. This is a very positive finding in that it shows that these new bullies have a conscience and a sense of right from wrong. With this information, both schools and parents can use this to their advantage to create active dialogue with the student/child on their choices. This conversation might make their negative online behavior short lived.

A final recommendation would be to examine current school policies as it relates to cyber bullying. The National Center for Education Statistics has recognized the growing problem of cyber bullying and now asks public schools to report how often they experience this behavior in school and how many of those allocate resources to the issue (Robers, Zhang & Truman, 2012). If we begin to understand the pathways and experiences behind cyber bullying, especially with students who have never engaged in traditional bullying, schools should be able to create student policies to more adequately address the issue.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

Although this study provides valuable insight into the pathway and experiences of students who have never bullied traditionally but who become cyber bullies, it is not without limitations. First, the study was limited to 29 ninth grade students from one high school site located in one specific geographic region in Michigan, decreasing the generalizability of the findings. Future research might involve a larger sample of

adolescents from a variety of geographical areas. Second, this sample included only ninth grade students so including students from other grade levels, specifically grades 6–8 and grade 10 would be recommended. It is possible the results would differ by both grade level and geographical areas.

Another limitation of this study is data were collected from ninth grade students who were participating in a required character education course. In this course a specific lesson was presented about bullying which is how the artifacts were obtained. Future research might seek to find ways to conduct a qualitative analysis without it being tied to a specific school course. A fourth limitation is the lesson was limited to a two- to four-day period of time. It would be recommended that future research collect data over a longer period of time to study ongoing bullying behaviors, especially for the new cyber bully. The findings in this study showed that the cyber bully had a very good handle on the emotions the victims feel when receiving the online aggression, so studying how knowing this changes or does not change their participation in this negative behavior would provide more valuable insight.

Furthermore, future studies should explore, in more detail each of the pathways. This is particularly important in assisting educational leaders and parents in dealing with the cyber bully. The experiences of the cyber bullies in each pathway were very different and would require different approaches in addressing the behavior. In addition, further research in each pathway may help to specifically determine which adults might have the most impact in addressing the issue of cyber bullying.

Finally, my study did not look at the victim of cyber bullying. Future research might look qualitatively at the experiences of cyber bullies. While this would be difficult



with adolescents it is imperative to determine how this often relentless bullying is affecting them socially and emotionally. All of these experiences, both the cyber bullies and the victim, will be essential in addressing the increasing problem both schools and parents are facing.

### **Closing Thoughts**

As schools are being expected to incorporate more technology into classrooms they will be faced with new challenges as a result. Technology can provide a whole new world of experiences and learning but can also present an entirely new way of communicating, which is done through the use of social networking sites. These social networking sites have given adolescents a new form of bullying—cyber bullying. Cyber bullying and its impacts is not something educators or parents can ignore. It has begun to cause disruptions in the learning environment and more and more schools are reporting they allocate staff resources now to deal with the problem. Gaining perspective about the pathway an adolescent takes in becoming a cyber bully becomes an essential element for schools in determining what policies, procedures and preventions can be put into place to minimize the negative effects this has on its students.

This study offered three pathways students who have never bullied in the traditional sense take in becoming a cyber bully. There has been years of research on traditional bullies and what is behind the bullies' actions, those likely do not differ when this type of bully extends his/her reach online. There has been, however, very little research in looking at those who become bullies for the first time online through the use of a social networking site. This study offers the pathways and experiences of this new

bully by studying the students' experiences through their own words. These pathways can be used to assist parents and schools in creating preventative procedures and educational opportunities that might help in stopping this new bully from ever forming. As a principal I am realistic that we will never fully stop cyber bullying or stop all adolescents who have never bullied traditionally in becoming a cyber bully. I am also, however, a firm believer that the more we understand our youth, and the pressures and influences they face, the closer we will come in making that happen. We play a critical role in the character development of our youth today and by understanding, in their words, what they experience, I am confident we will make a difference in the actions of youth online.

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**Appendix A**  
**Site Approval Letter**

Western Michigan University  
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, And Technology  
Principal Investigator: Dr. Jianping Shen  
Student Investigator: Michele Sideman

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Michele Sideman and I am a doctoral candidate at Western Michigan University. As part of my dissertation research, I have proposed to study the lived experiences of ninth grade students who have never bullied in the traditional form but have cyber bullied through the use of a social networking site. I will be studying their pathway and experiences of becoming a cyber bully. I am proposing to study this by analyzing artifacts produced by ninth grade students as part of their normal curriculum in their required Teen Leadership course. At no time will I interact with the students nor will the students leave their natural setting.

I am asking permission to conduct this research at the high school in your district where this course is taught. I will work with the teachers of this course to insure the activities specifically address the research questions in my study and will teach them how to de-identify the artifacts prior to submission to insure the anonymity of the students' work used in the study.

If you would kindly grant me the approval to conduct the study at the high school in your district where this course is taught, please read below and sign and date where indicated. You may also contact me with any questions at 616-698-9292.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

  
Michele Sideman

By signing my full name below, I give permission to Michele Sideman, doctoral candidate, at Western Michigan University, to conduct research at the high school where the required Teen Leadership course is taught, and where she serves as principal. I understand that Ms. Sideman will work directly with the teachers of the course to insure the activities specifically address the phenomenon being studied and how to de-identify the artifacts to protect the identity of the students.

  
Name

6-4-13  
Date



## **Appendix B**

### **HSIRB Approval Letter**

# WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: June 11, 2013

To: Jianping Shen, Principal Investigator  
Michele Sideman, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Amy Naugle".

Re: HSIRB Project Number 13-06-14

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Bystander to Bully: Understanding Cyber Bullying in Secondary Schools" has been **approved** under the **exempt** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., ***you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study."*** Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

**Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.**

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

**Approval Termination: June 11, 2014**

**Appendix C**  
**Student Assignments**

## Student Reflection Survey

Please complete the survey below which will allow you to reflect on your experiences with bullying. This survey will be helpful for upcoming activities so your honesty is critical in making the experiences meaningful.

Have you ever.....(answer yes or no)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Physically intimidated a person by continuously hitting, bumping or shoving them?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Teased someone repeatedly to their face?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Intentionally excluded someone to purposely make them feel bad?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Forwarded an inappropriate picture or mean text about someone else without permission from the person who sent it to you?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Posted pictures of someone online or forwarded by text without their permission?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. "Liked" or "Retweeted" someone else's rude or mean comments about another person on a social networking site?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Posted a comment that was rude or threatening to or about someone else on a social networking site?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Signed on to someone else's social networking account with the intention of teasing/intimidating another person?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Created an online poll or completed an online poll about someone without their permission?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Posted lies/rumors about someone on a social networking site?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Been a victim of physical bullying or intimidation to your face?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Had someone else post a lie/rumor about you on a social networking site?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Been a victim of ongoing rude, negative, or intimidating comments on a social networking site?

## Journal Writings

Journal 1: Describe a time where you posted, “liked” or “retweeted” a negative comment online about someone else, or signed on to someone else’s account with the same intention. Include in the journal what led you to do this, summarize the incident (do not use names or exact comments), and how doing this made you feel.

Journal 2: Describe a time when you physically bullied, teased, or intentionally excluded another person to their face. Include in your journal what led you to do this, summarize what happened (do not use real names) and how what you did made you feel.

Journal 3: Describe a time when you have been a victim of or bystander to bullying online. Include a summary of the incident (do not use real names), how it made you feel, and what, if anything, you did about it.

### Six Paragraph Paper

Answer the following questions below in paragraph format. Please type a minimum of four sentences to answer each question, but you are encouraged to write as much as needed to adequately answer the question.

1. In your opinion what is the difference between traditional bullying and cyber bullying and which do you see as worse? Use examples to support your opinion.
2. Why do you think kids choose to bully online via social networking sites?
3. Do you believe there is a difference between being a bystander to traditional bullying and being a bystander to online bullying? Explain your answer.
4. If you have ever “liked” someone else’s mean status on facebook or agreed with a mean “tweet” or tweeted/created your own mean status about someone else on a social networking site, how did that make you feel? If you have never done any of the above how did it make you feel watching others participate?
5. Do you believe you are anonymous when you are online? Do you believe this impacts whether or not students choose to bully online?
6. If you could stop online bullying, how would you do it?

## Photo Story

**Instructions:** Create a story about a cyber bully. This story should be based on your real life experience when possible. Please DO NOT include real names. You need to have at least one line of text for the story on each slide. Make sure to include everything from the checklist on each slide.

- **Step 1:** Write out your story. Make sure to include all the details you need.  
Separate the story into 6 slides as shown below.
- **Step 2:** Make your 6 pictures for the story in Microsoft Paint. Save each picture to your ID number as “picture 1,” “picture 2,” etc.
- **Step 3:** You will put the story together using the program Microsoft Photo Story. You will upload each picture to Photo Story then add text to the picture. You will also be able to add music at the end.
- **Step 4:** Save the PhotoStory as “lastname.firstname” and email it to your teacher.

**Slide 1:** Introduce your character. Must include:

- Name (must be a fake name)
- Gender
- Age/grade level

**Slide 2:** Give more background information about your character. Must include:

- Hobbies (Sports? Shopping? Partying? Etc.)
- Where does the person fit in at school? (Popular? Nerd? Outcast?)
- Personality (Shy? Talkative? Important to be liked by others?)

**Slide 3:** The cyber bullying act occurs. Must include:

- Time of day it occurs (morning, afternoon, evening, middle of the night)
- Where it occurs (in bedroom, in classroom, in hallway, on bus, etc.)

- Type of technology used to cyberbully (cell phone, computer, etc.)
- Where in technology it occurs (text message, twitter, facebook, etc.)
- People who are around (friends with you encouraging you, parents sitting in the same room and not knowing, no one, etc.)

**Slide 4:** The victim receiving the cyber bullying message. Must include:

- When the person reads/see the cyber bullying (morning, afternoon, evening, middle of the night)
- Where it occurs (in bedroom, in classroom, in hallway, on bus, etc.)
- What technology you think the person sees it on (cell phone, computer, etc.)
- What is the person's reaction to reading it (Anger? Sadness? Funny? Don't care? Etc.)
- Who is around the person when he/she reads/sees it (friends, parents, no one, etc.)

**Slide 5:** What happens after the victim reads it? Must include:

- What emotion does the victim have? (Sadness? Anger? Happiness? Etc)
- What does the victim do right after he/she see it? (Nothing? Want to fight? Yell? Cry? Write something back? Tell friends? Etc.)

**Slide 6:** What happens later? How does the story end? Must include:

- Does something else happen or not?
- Does the cyber bully do something else?
- Do they talk to each other, fight, ignore?
- Does anyone else get involved (School? Friends? Police? Parents? No one? etc.)