

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE ORIGINATION AND  
MANIFESTATION OF THE CYBERBULLY/CYBERBULLYING VICTIM RELATIONSHIP  
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CYBERBULLYING VICTIMS

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A Phenomenological Investigation of the Origination and Manifestation of the  
Cyberbully/Cyberbullying Victim Relationship from the Perspective of Cyberbullying Victims

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## Abstract

Cyberbullying has gained a considerable amount of media attention in recent years (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). However, little is known about the details of cyberbully/cyberbullying victim relationships within the lived experience of victims. This phenomenological study investigated the origination and manifestation of the cyberbully/cyberbullying victim relationship. The study is phenomenological in order to examine the origination of the cyberbully/cyberbullying victim relationship and how the relationship is manifested in the lived experience of participants who were cyberbullying victims. The study examines the impact of the cyberbully/cyberbullying victim relationship from the theoretical perspective of Vygotsky's (1986) sociocultural learning theory and Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Research questions investigated the origination of cyberbullying from the perspective of the victim, strategies used by victims in coping with victimization, and the manifestation of cyberbullying online and in physical and psychological settings offline. Qualitative data were gathered through Second Life interviews, Twitter blog entries, and Second Life focus groups and analyzed to determine the impact of cyberbullying on eight recent graduates in rural Georgia. A hermeneutic approach to phenomenology was used in order to bridge the communication gap between students and educational administrators created by the rapid rise of information technology. The findings of this study indicates that cyberbullying arises from damaged relationships and causes strong emotional reactions in a vastly different holistic reality misunderstood by most educational leaders due to a generational divide.

Descriptors: Cyberbullying, Cyberbullying Victimization, Bullying, Phenomenology, Hermeneutics

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Introduction to Cyberbullying

The waning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought significant changes to traditional patterns of information technology. As the new millennium approached, the traditional patterns of information exchange were tossed aside as new mediums of exchange associated with the Internet replaced slower methods traditionally used by humans for decades. The accelerated pace of information and learning brought a new era to mankind that can best be defined as the Information Age (Huitt, 1999).

As the Information Age dawned in America, schools reaped the benefits of the technological innovations that placed tremendous amounts of knowledge just a search engine away (Huitt, 1999). Educators continue to scramble to make use of the marvel in front of them, but the new technology has revealed itself to have a darker side that many educators are struggling to address (Shariff, 2008). The new technologies created an opportunity to extend the traditional format of bullying into the new realm of cyberspace, creating a rapidly changing form of psychological bullying online (Kowalski et al., 2008; Mason, 2008; Patchin & Hindjua, 2006; Shariff, 2008). Preteens and teens sought new ways to embarrass and harass other teens using the new technologies to create an entirely new format of bullying commonly referred to as cyberbullying (Aftab, 2008). Cyberbullying entered our world in a format unknown and misunderstood by most adults and rapidly grew into a significant and highly misunderstood threat (Prensky 2001a). Although most cyberbullying takes place at home, the effects of cyberbullying have entered schools, causing educators to debate whether cyberbullying is a significant problem in their schools and whether they should begin to fight back (Shariff, 2008).

During the Information Age, schools were presented with technological advancements that enhanced the social interaction of students and have indicated a positive impact in all subject areas (Li, 2006a). Schools rushed into action, attempting to integrate many of the new forms of technology into the curriculum and reap the rewards of modern communications (Huitt, 1999). As young people became more familiar with technological information, some of them have found a way to use the promising new technologies to achieve a traditional purpose: bullying (Kowalski et al., 2008; Patchin & Hindjua, 2006; Shariff, 2008).

The impact on schools has been acknowledged by several studies. McGuinness (2007) stated that poor grades are connected with cyberbullying victimization, taking a position that had been supported by other researchers as well (Mason, 2008; Beran & Li, 2007). Studies seeking to explain the decrease in academic achievement largely focus on the problem behaviors associated with cyberbullying victimization (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007a; Katzer, Fetchenhauer, & Belshack, 2009). Although McGuinness' (2007) statement may very well be true in light of the psychological impact of cyberbullying victimization, the statement has yet to be either proved or disproved through either quantitative or qualitative studies. Studies in the realm of cyberbullying remain in the early stages as the topic is relatively new, but research on the potential dangers to the education of students warrants immediate and more extensive research.

In recent years, media outlets have focused considerable attention on several major accounts of cyberbullying victimization. Media coverage of the beating of Victoria Lindsay brought attention to the connection between traditional physical bullying and new psychological tactics associated with cyberbullying through the easy access and use of new technologies (Kowalski et al., 2008). The suicide of Megan Meier brought attention to the tragic possibilities associated with cyberbullying victimization when students feel that they can no longer cope with

the fallout of their victimization (Tokunaga, 2010). While cyberbullying remains highly underestimated and misunderstood by educational leaders (Li, 2006a), the coverage by the mainstream media has served to bring attention to the severity and urgency of cyberbullying victimization.

The exact reaction of educational leaders to the increased coverage is yet to be determined. Studies prior to the increased focus showed that few educational leaders even understood that students were being bullied online (Li, 2006a). The finding, although it may change with the new national attention, demonstrated that educational leadership is largely disconnected with online behaviors and the possible consequences due to the digital divide suggested by Prensky (2001a). The explanation for the disparity between cyberbullying behaviors and the perceptions of educational leaders may lie in the lack of research in the field and the ability of educational leaders to understand a generation separated by technology and language (Prensky, 2001b)..

Adolescents find easy access to potential means for cyberbullying and fully understand how to use the technological outlets (Kowalski et al., 2008; Shariff, 2008). Quantitative studies have indicated that the most popular avenues for attack are email, text messaging, instant messaging, chat rooms, polling booths, websites, tweets, web blogs, and video sharing (Li, 2006a; Li, 2007b). Just as there are many avenues for attack, many different strategies of attack exist in cyberspace today. Cyberbullying can be expressed through such behaviors as flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing, exclusion/ostracism, cyberstalking, happy slapping/hopping (Kowalski et al., 2008).

The language expressed for avenues of attack and strategies for attack are foreign to most educational leaders. The lack of knowledge in online terminology is a basic indicator of the



chasm that exists between the student as the digital native and the administrator as the digital immigrant (Prensky, 2001a). The lack of understanding between the two is considerable, but the problem is growing greater as time introduces more technology. The rapidly evolving nature of cyberspace may reveal more avenues by the publication of this study, so gaining a basis for understanding victimization is urgent.

### **Background**

Quantitative research suggests that cyberbullying is a relatively new and potentially dangerous practice that has a major impact in the lives of many young people (Shariff, 2008). The rapid increase in technology beginning in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, termed as the Information Age (Huitt, 1999), has revealed several new methods for bullying. Cyberbullying has many avenues for attack, and each form has proven to be an effective means in which attacks may be generated. The current avenues for cyberbullying attacks include email, text messaging, instant messaging, chat rooms, polling booths, websites, web blogs, and video sharing.

Cyberbullying is a new and extremely threatening behavior impacting young people. The rapid increase in technology has revealed several new methods for bullying. For most young people, these technologies are easily accessible and easy to use. In addition to the constant connection, the methods used for cyberbullying are often unknown by adults or done away from their supervision (Keith & Martin, 2005). Keith and Martin (2005) also found that most parents believed that their child could never do anything as mean as cyberbullying another child, but they found that the parental perception was often not the reality.

Experts have had trouble defining cyberbullying from the time it first appeared due to the rapidly changing landscape of cyberspace (Kowalski et al., 2008). As cyberbullying evolved, definitions have shifted to encompass the new avenues of attack. Shariff (2008) complained that

many definitions were too simplistic and fail to recognize the complexities of cyberbullying, especially the intricate makeup of cyberspace. The fact that cyberbullying is relatively new and has evolved so quickly, has sent experts scrambling to find a definition that is relatively concise while fully inclusive of the nature of the problem. Shariff and Strong-Wilson (2005) defined cyberbullying as “compromising covert, psychological bullying, conveyed through the electronic media such as cell phones, weblogs and websites, online chat rooms, MUD rooms and Xangas” (Shariff, 2008, p.30). Three years later, Shariff (2008) added that he would like to modify that definition to include networks such as Facebook, YouTube, Orkut, LinkedIn, MySpace, and others which are constantly surfacing on the Internet. Shariff’s (2008) desire to revise his own definition in such a short time is another example of the conscious effort that experts are making to keep up with changes to the problem.

Cyberbullying is a topic that is still in the infancy stage in terms of knowledge and research, leading to inadequacies in several areas (Kowalski et al., 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Tokunaga, 2010). The topic is so new that researchers even seem to disagree on whether the correct spelling of the term should be cyberbullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006), cyber-bullying (Shariff, 2008; Li, 2006a), or cyber bullying (Kowalski et al, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). With the disagreement as shallow as the spelling of basic terminology, a precise and comprehensive definition is nearly impossible to identify when the speed of change is considered.

### **The Problem Statement**

Educators have long understood and attempted to minimize the threat that traditional forms of bullying pose to schools (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). Traditional forms of bullying can have long lasting consequences for both the perpetrator and the victim, including

poor grades and undesirable behaviors inside and outside of school (McGuinness, 2007). Schools have gone to great lengths in their attempts to end bullying on school campuses because they realize the threats that bullies pose to the health of the school environment as well as the threat to the health of individual students.

Cyberbullying threats present many of the same problems as traditional bullying. Traditional forms of bullying can produce serious psychological and physical problems, and some studies have found that the effects of cyberbullying can be even more intense and harmful than traditional bullying (Kowalski et al., 2008). The severity of the impact of cyberbullying is amplified because modern technology has taken away the home of the student as a safe haven. The environment that served as a protective shield in the time before modern technological innovations has now become the most common arena for attack.

Cyberbullying research, being in the infant stages of research, is filled with gaps that need to be filled (Kowalski et al., 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Tokunaga, 2010). Qualitative research is lacking across the entire genre of research. Although quantitative research has investigated some aspects of cyberbullying origination and manifestation online and offline, no in-depth qualitative studies have been identified that provide insight into the behavior from the participants' perspective in the paradigms of their lived experience. The gap relating to the origination and manifestation of cyberbullying behaviors is particularly notable due to the importance of understanding those aspects of cyberbullying for preventing future occurrences.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to examine the origination of cyberbullying victimization and the manifestation of cyberbullying victimization in the online and offline lived experience of participants who were cyberbullying victims. The study utilized qualitative data from the

perspective of participants with experience in cyberbullying victimization to determine the underlying causes and the depth of the carryover from physical settings into the realm of cyberspace. The study works to fill in some of the gaps in research relating to the development and direction of cyberbullying practices in cyberspace and inform educational leaders of how cyberbullying victimization originates, leading to a carryover effect into the physical world of the students.

Determining and providing detail pertaining to the origin of cyberbullying victimization is a key component of preventing future occurrences. While quantitative studies have been inconclusive in the origins of cyberbullying, attention is needed in determining the factors behind the origination of cyberbullying victimization (Hindjua & Patchin, 2007a; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). Quantitative research indicates that the origination of cyberbullying victimization can often begin with a personal relationship or anonymously and that the origin needs greater attention and detail beyond a simplistic relationship (Tokunaga, 2010).

Quantitative data has indicated that cyberbullying victimization can have carryover effects that extend beyond cyberspace into the daily physical lives of students psychologically and physically (Kowalski et al., 2008; Mason, 2010; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Shariff, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). The study sought to explain the impact of psychological bullying in cyberspace on the psychological and physical lived experience of the participants once they leave cyberspace. Detail on the carryover from online to offline behaviors seek to provide a foundation to understanding coping mechanisms and issues that need to be addressed in order for victims to successfully overcome cyberbullying victimization.

### **Significance of the Study**

Even with the attention that cyberbullying has received in the news, cyberbullying remains a problem that is often overlooked by educational leaders (Li, 2006a). Several studies have been conducted on cyberbullying in recent years, but most are either done on middle school children or conducted overseas. Cyberbullying research has focused on urban and suburban areas, failing to address the depth of cyberbullying problems in rural areas. Very few studies have been conducted on high school students in America, and nothing of note focusing on the Southeastern United States. The beating of Victoria Lindsay in Florida drew the attention of nationwide audiences and exposed the lack of research on cyberbullying research in the Southeast. The dearth of studies in secondary grades in the Southeast and beyond is shocking and becoming more evident as viewers nationwide see instances of cyberbullying perpetrated by and against high school students on news reports.

The gaps in the research are far too numerous to completely address in any specific study at this juncture as cyberbullying research is still in the infant stages (Kowalski et al., 2008). While geographical and age range gaps are problematic, the purpose of this study is to provide a foundation for future studies to fill in those gaps by bridging the gap between generations that were raised before and after the start of the Information Age. The generational gaps between digital natives, those who never knew the world before the Information Age, and digital immigrants, those who completed their education before the Information Age arose, are far deeper than surface knowledge in information technology (Prensky, 2001a). Even though many digital immigrants may have learned to use various technological innovations, major differences remain that serve as examples of a digital disconnect. While digital immigrants view cyberspace

as a distant and inanimate entity in daily life, digital natives believe that cyberspace is an extension of the physical realm (Prensky, 2001b).

This study is intended to bridge the gap of generational misconceptions over the reality of cyberspace and the transition to daily life of a generation that is never far from cyberspace. The study helps to provide a foundation concerning the impact of online victimization in an offline environment. As the researcher, I served as a bridge working to communicate the misunderstood messages of digital natives into a format that can be more easily understood by a generation of educational leaders who are far less comfortable operating online. With my intention to serve as a bridge, the study was conducted through the genre of hermeneutics in order to provide a translation of the voice of victims to an audience that fails to understand their perspective and experience (van Manen, 1990). The study will work to deliver the voices of the victims in a format that can make educational leaders aware of the concerns and needs of cyberbullying victims. The need for the study is clearly demonstrated in Li's (2006a) finding that most educational leaders do not consider cyberbullying to be a problem for their students.

While the study has specific implications in an under researched geographical area, the findings of the study have the potential to be significant on both a national and a global level. The results of the study seek to provide qualitative depth to quantitative studies and provide a foundation for future qualitative studies on the topic. Educational leaders who are seeking detail on problems for making informed decisions in relation to cyberbullying in high schools would be the primary benefactors of the study. The study seeks to provide principals, assistant principals, and superintendents with a more complete picture of the origination and manifestation of cyberbullying victimization. The results of the study should enable educational leaders to meet

the needs of their students by proactively working to prevent the onset of cyberbullying as well as providing students with a better idea of avenues to take if they are victimized.

### **Researcher's Role**

In the early 1990s, I was a high school student as the Internet became widely used as a research and educational tool. I became familiar with the nuances and trends during my school years and continued to grow as the technology quickly spread and expanded. I was born and raised in an era that fits squarely between those who have been described as digital natives and digital immigrants. Educators born and raised before the Information Age took hold are referred to as digital immigrants due to their relatively new and uncomfortable movement into the new technology (Prensky, 2001b). There are many educators, particularly in leadership positions, who have made the choice not to learn the new technological innovations that have shaped modern education. Educators who strongly resist the cumbersome move to accept and integrate technology are commonly referred to as digital dinosaurs in educational circles due to their place outside of Prensky's (2001a) paradigm.

I chose to begin my postsecondary education at Valdosta State University. I received my undergraduate BSEd. in social science education from Valdosta State in 1998. I chose to return to Valdosta State for my MEd. in social science education, which I completed in 2007.

Throughout my time at Valdosta State University, I was required to complete many courses in education that focused heavily on the use of computers to improve educational practice. While the courses never mentioned potential negative student influences through cyberbullying, they were useful for personal mastery of technology and learning to change with technology.

As an educator, I have been told by numerous students, parents, colleagues, and fellow doctoral students that cyberbullying is a problem and that many of their students, children, and

friends have been impacted. The words of my students and my research have led me to the assumption that many students are troubled by their experiences in cyberspace. I have had several students that wished to tell me of their victimization when they learned that I was working on the topic. Since I was not qualified to handle the issue or cleared to discuss the issue with students at that time, I referred them to the counselor immediately. My assumptions should not prove problematic because I understand that all circumstances are different and that individuals may react differently. The lack of specific qualitative information in any case should limit any connection between my assumptions of cyberbullying victimization and role as a researcher.

I was not born in the Information Age, but I was immersed in technology in an early stage in my educational experience. Due to my immersion during my impressionable youth, I understand Information Age paradigms of thought in relation to technology. I view myself as a bridge between these generations to translate the voice of a student generation that is often misunderstood by a different generation of administrators separated by a considerable digital divide described by Prensky (2001a, 2001b).

I took on a subjective perspective while serving as an interviewer, an interpreter, and translator throughout the study. I followed van Manen's (1990) suggested role of describing the lived experience of the participants by actively acknowledging any potential bias or distracters that may arise in the course of the study in order to remain subjective throughout. By taking a reflective stance throughout the data collection and analysis process through acknowledging any personal distractions and bias, I was able to conduct a balanced approach to phenomenological inquiry into the lived experience of participants (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990).



### **Nature of the Study**

The study was conducted using 8 adult participants who graduated in the past school year from a small rural high school in southwest Georgia. The small sample size was intended to provide for an in-depth analysis of a small number of students rather than a surface analysis of a larger number. The utilization of a rural high school addresses two major gaps in the research as most studies have been conducted in urban areas and primarily in middle grades.

Data was collected through interviews, focus groups, and journal writing. In order to maintain the nature of anonymity and the disinhibition effect of cyberspace, interviews and focus groups was conducted in the avatar-based virtual reality site Second Life while journal writing was conducted through the microblogging technology in Twitter. Collected data was analyzed through the hermeneutic approach and utilized the selective approach of van Manen (1990). Themes were organized to provide for a navigation and translation of the lived experience of participants to be communicated to an audience that is largely out of touch with the more technologically proficient younger generation (Prensky, 2001a).

### **Research Questions**

The primary focus of inquiry for this study is as follows: What are the lived experiences of first year high school graduates that reported being victims of cyberbullying with regards to their perceptions of the origin of their cyberbullying experience and how they see it continuing to manifest itself in both online and offline settings?

The study seeks to expand on quantitative studies on cyberbullying and determine how the intricate details of the relationship between cyberbullies and cyberbullying victims manifests into a significant social, emotional, and academic problem online and offline. The study examines the impact of cyberbullying victimization on recent graduates through the voice of the

participants. The information from the study gives researchers some clarification into the details of cyberbullying victimization on students and their educational experiences through the establishment of a qualitative perspective. The following research questions were used to guide the collection and analysis of data:

1. What are the perspectives of individuals who are cyberbullying victims in regards to the origination of their victimization?
2. In what context or contexts does the cyberbullying/cyberbullying victim relationship impact the lived experience of cyberbullying victims after the initial incidence of cyberbullying?
3. What strategies do victims of cyberbullying report that they use to cope with cyber-victimization?

### **Definitions**

In order to understand the concepts behind the study, several specific terms associated with cyberbullying victimization need to be defined. The defined terms are crucial to the understanding of the problem and the results of the study. With the great disparity that exists between digital immigrants and digital natives (Prensky 2001a, Prensky, 2001b), an extended explanation of terminology is needed to convey the nature of the problem to an audience composed primarily of digital immigrants.

**Cyberbullying.** Experts have had trouble defining cyber bullying from the time research began on the topic. As cyberbullying evolved, definitions have shifted to encompass the new avenues of attack. Shariff (2008) complained that many definitions were too simplistic and failed to recognize the complexities of cyberbullying, especially the intricate makeup of cyberspace. The fact that cyberbullying is relatively new and has evolved so quickly, has sent experts

scrambling to find a definition that is relatively concise while fully inclusive of the nature of the problem. The scramble to maintain an accurate definition has caused considerable difficulty in the gathering of data, even causing large disagreements on how many students are actually victimized online (Tokunaga, 2010).

In order to maintain a definition that is broad enough to address the problem without attempting to cover every new trend, this study followed cyberbullying lawyer Parry Aftab's (2008b) definition of cyberbullying as "when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones" (para. 1). The maintenance of a broad and relatively simple definition that does not sway with online trends may prove to be the key to determining the true extent of cyberbullying victimization.

**Cyberbullying victimization.** With the established definition of cyberbullying being previously addressed, the term cyberbullying victimization would be used to identify any student who had been a target of a cyberbullying attack. The term is often mistakenly used to identify adult involvement, but Aftab (2008b) strongly asserts the legal view that "once adults become involved, it is plain and simple cyber-harassment or cyberstalking" and that "adult cyber-harassment or cyberstalking is NEVER called cyberbullying" (para. 1).

**Information Age.** The Information Age is a term used to describe the rapid rise of the transfer of information through the use of a rapidly changing and interconnected global continuum through the use of computers and information technology. The speed of communication and the narrowing of physical distances results in a newfound speed of change in a globally connected world (Huitt, 1999). The reality of the new transfer and resulting cyber spheres of reality resulted in a considerable digital divide between those born before the dawn of

the Information Age and those who were forced to integrate the traditional patterns of thought with the new and constantly growing technologies (Prensky, 2001a; 2001b).

**Instant Messaging.** Typically done through computers connected to the Internet, instant messaging is a method of conversation between two or more individuals through written messages sent directly to the screen name of the recipient or multiple recipients in a real-time format. Instant messaging may also be achieved through newer cell phones with Internet capabilities, allowing for a far more mobile system that can reach into the traditional school campus far more easily. Instant messaging can also be used to send embarrassing photographs or information. It has been known to be done, through assuming a screen name used to impersonate a bullying victim, to appear that the information was coming directly from the victim themselves (Kowalski et al., 2008).

**Screen Name.** An anonymous identity assumed by an individual who does not wish to use their real name online. While anonymity may be used for safety purposes, they are often used to conceal the true identity of a perpetrator of cyberbullying attacks. The anonymity provided by the use of falsified screen names can cause a disinhibition effect that results in a far more open attack on cyberbullying victims than traditional social norms in a known setting would allow (Mason, 2008). Screen names can also be used by cyberbullies to impersonate cyberbullying victims in several different formats (Kowalski et al., 2008).

**Chat Rooms.** Chat rooms are areas available online that allow for two or more persons to converse through written text in a real-time format. Chat room participants enter a chat room using an anonymous screen name for conversational purposes, but the screen name can be used as a disinhibition mechanism (Mason, 2008) or for impersonation purposes (Kowalski et al., 2008). Occasionally, chat rooms can allow for the expression of personality through the use of

avatars, providing an additional avenue for disguising an identity or impersonating a victim whose personal traits and interests are known.

**Texting / Text Messaging.** Text messages are relatively brief messages sent over cell phones. The most common form, Short Message Service (SMS), is limited to 160 characters. The limited space often leads to abbreviations in the digital language that may be confusing to those unfamiliar with the language. Texting is the act of sending text messages to another person. In order to meet the format of an abbreviated field of characters, chat speak is often used to express more complex thoughts, with the appeal of a shorter word and an unfamiliar word to adults unfamiliar with the format (Prensky, 2001b).

**Chat Speak.** Chat speak is an abbreviated terminology that is often used online. The abbreviated format includes commonly accepted abbreviations that are not currently recognized as an accurate representation of vocabulary by traditional sources such as dictionaries. Nonetheless, the terminology is widely accepted and used as appropriate online vocabulary by a large percentage of young people who grew up with the commonality of short representations necessary for limited message fields. Some forms shorten words while others refer to a series of common phrases. As an example, “ppl” refers to people in a word abbreviation and “rofl” shortens five words “rolling on the floor laughing,” to represent of a common phrase. The abbreviated language often provides a barrier for linguistic misunderstanding between digital immigrants and digital natives (Prensky, 2001b).

**Social Networks.** Social networks are online communities of individuals that have something in common to link them together. Commonalities that link individuals include factors such as interests, hobbies, geographic location, and educational institutions. Some examples of well known and highly utilized social networking sites in the United States are Facebook,

MySpace, LinkedIn, and Twitter. The complex format of social networks allow for the posting of locations, personal interests, photographs, and real-time journal-style blogs (Kowalski et al., 2008). Multiple dangers are connected with the posting of too much information online, ranging from impersonating a cyberbullying victim online to the gathering of potentially dangerous personal information (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007b).

**Video Sharing.** Video sharing is the sharing of personally recorded digital video clips, typically done through the use of a video sharing website. Common examples of video sharing sites frequented by students in the United States are YouTube and Flickr, but some common social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook also contain video sharing capabilities. Most videos shared online are taken on cellular telephones due to the widespread accessibility and nature of phones. The ease of cell phone use and accessibility at any point in time often results in the online posting of arguments, fights, and sexual situations (Shariff, 2008).

**Sexting.** Sexting is a rapidly growing behavior among adolescents. Sexting involves taking and sending sexually explicit photographs through Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) files over cellular telephones. Sexting has grown in popularity in recent years, primarily because of the widespread availability of picture-taking advancements in cellular telephones. Sexting photographs have become an important issue as they are often passed to unintended audiences, causing embarrassment and ostracism (Shariff, 2008).

**Flaming.** Flaming occurs when two or more individuals engage in an emotionally charged exchange in a public forum online. Kowalski et al. (2008) attributes most of the activity to online chat rooms and discussion boards, but social networking may also come into play. Flaming must be able to be viewed by a larger audience, so the one-on-one style associated with email and instant messaging would not be associated with an incidence of flaming.

**Denigration.** Denigration is a means for making embarrassing or untrue information about a victim available to a large audience. The purpose of denigration is to embarrass and cause the victim to be ostracized from their social group. Denigration takes many forms. The most common forms are the spread of rumors and the posting of derogatory comments. News accounts in recent years have come from the passing of altered photos online to suggest sexual activity or the spreading of photos associated with sexting to unintended audiences to cause embarrassment. Typically, denigration is driven by someone who is close to the victim or who has been close to them in the past (Kowalski et al., 2008).

**Impersonation.** Impersonation occurs when a cyberbully takes on the screen name or identity of the victim for malicious purposes. While posing as the victim, cyberbullies have sent offensive messages, sexual messages, and sexual images to friends or classmates of the victim in order to cause the victim to be ridiculed or ostracized (Kowalski et al., 2008). In some instances, cyberbullies have created web pages using the victim's identity without their knowledge. However, most cases occur when the cyberbully steals the identity and password of the victim for online harassment. In many cases, the cyberbully is a former friend that the victim trusted with their password information, allowing an open door for attack.

**Outing.** Outing refers to the sharing of personal information to a wider and unintended audience (Kowalski et al., 2008). The information is usually gathered by a friend or someone posing as a friend through the use of a stolen screen name. The shared information often includes personal messages not intended for a wide audience, which then leads to considerable embarrassment. In sexting, the spreading of embarrassing photographs of individuals engaging in sexual acts to new audiences is a prime example of the nature of outing.

**Exclusion/ostracism.** Adolescents perceive cyberspace to be a tangible social setting because of their comfort within the medium. When they are left out of social settings online, the process is known as exclusion or ostracism. Exclusion can occur when the victim is removed from friend lists or removed from online groups, resulting in a feeling of social ostracism. Although the medium of exchange is quite different, victimization online through exclusion feels similar to traditional exclusion in the minds of adolescents that do not differentiate between cyber and worldly mediums. According to Kowalski et al. (2008), teens excluded online tend to join other online groups more readily than others in order to gain social acceptance in cyberspace.

**Cyberstalking.** Cyberstalking is repetitive harassment online. In order to be considered cyberstalking, the bully must have the intention of physically harming the victim or give the perception of the intention to harm. Most incidents of adult attacks on minors qualify as cyberstalking because of criminal laws and the highly publicized incidents of sexual assaults on minors connected to cyberspace. According to Aftab (2008), cyber laws specifically refer to adult behaviors online in a completely different manner. In all cases of adult involvement, Aftab (2008) suggests instead using cyberstalking to specifically recognize the severity of adult attacks on minors.

### **Delimitations**

School districts are particularly protective of minors under their charge, especially in delicate emotional situations. In order to address the concern of finding participants, I decided to include only participants over 18 in the portions of the study where identities are known. While the decision creates some limitations in participants, it addresses some ethical concerns that are more disconcerting when studying minors. In order to limit the time differential between victims



and their victimization, only recent graduates from the prior year at the chosen site were used in the study.

### **Research Plan**

This is a qualitative study conducted through the genre of phenomenology. Phenomenology was chosen in order to listen to the voices of cyberbullying victims and translate their individual voices into a collective response to cyberbullying victimization. Hermeneutics (van Manen, 1990) was chosen as the specific approach as I serve as a bridge between the collective voice of cyberbullying victims and educational leaders that are not able to understand the voice of a different digital generation (Prensky, 2001a).

Adult graduates from the prior school year were used in the study. The participants took part in audio taped individual and group interviews and submit individual journal writings. In order to maintain an accurate representation of online behavior and the disinhibition effect, all interviews and focus group sessions were conducted through Second Life and all journal writings were submitted via Twitter.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

As the world entered the Information Age, schools were presented with technological advancements that enhanced the social interaction of students and indicated a positive impact in all subject areas (Li, 2006a). Schools rushed into action, attempting to integrate many of the new forms of technology into the curriculum and reap the rewards of modern communications. As young people became more familiar with technological information, some of them found a way to use the promising new technologies to achieve a more traditional purpose: bullying.

Quantitative research has indicated that the new form of psychological bullying has serious negative effects on the social and emotional well-being of students. While indications of serious adverse consequences of cyberbullying are clear, the statistics do not reveal the perceptions of students of the phenomenon from their viewpoint. While quantitative research has clearly established an adverse relationship between cyberbullying victimization and student social, emotional, and academic success, the voices of students involved in the phenomenon are yet to be studied at any considerable depth.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the area of cyberbullying, strong foundations in theory are seriously lacking in research. Tokunaga (2010) found that most researchers in the field have operated largely without a theoretical foundation. Without a solid historical foundation in empirical research, I have chosen to build the basis for this study on the general foundation of two widely accepted educational theories.

Vygotsky's (1986) socio-cultural theory is based on the belief the social experience of the participant is crucial to the learning experience. Socio-cultural learning paradigms indicate that

learning arises from the social and cultural experiences that students encounter throughout their lives. Effective socio-cultural learning environments seek to use Vygotsky's (1986) theory to promote social experiences in order to enhance student learning experiences (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Problems in socialization would lead to disturbances in student emotions and socializations, which would lead to disturbances in learning and personal growth. Cyberbullying is a direct attack on a person that transcends traditional social norms due to the unique nature of cyberspace. The disturbance in social perception resulting from cyberbullying victimization, as viewed through the socio-cultural lens, explains the psychological problems documented in research.

These documented psychological problems may also be explained through Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow's (1954) hierarchy holds that individuals progress through the following stages: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. According to the foundational aspects of Maslow's (1943) motivation theory, fulfillment of safety needs is as important in the building of normal adults as the physiological aspects of psychology and can occasionally even eclipse the physiological needs in importance due to the perception of particularly dangerous situations. People may not progress upward on the hierarchy until they have achieved complete fulfillment in their current stage.

Throughout the school years, adolescents have traditionally relied on parents and other trustworthy adults for safety concerns (Maslow, 1943), but the traditional safe havens are undercut by the nature of cyberbullying victimization. According to the progression of the hierarchy, cyberbullying victimization would stall the progression at the level of safety. No further progression would be possible until the safety needs are met, which would prevent the

participant from rising above that level. Without the progression, cyberbullying victims would suffer in the areas of love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization.

For the purposes of this study, the two theories work together to determine the level of disruption in socialization and social learning caused by the origin and manifestation of cyberbullying victimization. Researching the origination of the victimization, the feelings invoked by victimization, modalities of the manifestation, and the coping and reaction strategies of victims provide a picture of the impact of cyberbullying victimization on the social and perceptual paradigms of participants. The reactions of the participants to victimization provide a glimpse of whether their socialization and hierarchical needs were delayed or interrupted as they attempted to cope and move on from their victimization in cyberspace or the physical realm. In addition, the theories form a structure to analyze whether the reactions of socialization in cyberspace and the physical realm operate independently or whether patterns of socialization and learning are directly connected in the transition from cyberspace to reality.

### **Traditional Bullying**

Bullying has been an issue at the forefront of education for some time. In the era before the widespread advance of information technology, Olweus (1993a, 1994) defined bullying as repeated physical, verbal, or psychological attacks or intimidation directed against a victim who cannot properly defend him or herself because of size or strength, or because the victim is outnumbered or less psychologically resilient. While the definition has been dislodged by attempts to integrate cyberbullying behaviors due to strength roles, it provides an accurate broad definition for the traditional approach to bullying. Although bullying research began long ago, a wide scale emphasis on bullying prevention is relatively new. Beginning with the birth of the Information Age, educational leaders placed a new focus on bullying prevention due to an

increased focus on bullying due to violence and suicides that garnered the attention of the mass media (Shariff, 2008).

Traditional bullying can take on two major forms, each of which may cause specific physical or psychological hardships to victims. Olweus (1993a) first described and delineated them as direct bullying and indirect bullying. The physical, or direct form, involves contact to the body in some form or fashion. The psychological, or indirect form, focuses on embarrassment and ostracism. Although physical is more noticeable and receives more attention, both forms are worthy of intense focus.

Physical bullying can take on many forms. While some forms may look like innocent play at times, some forms can become quite extreme. Extreme forms may include beating, choking, throwing objects, assault, and placing harmful substances on the victim (Olweus, 1993a; Shariff, 2008). In the realm of physical bullying, the victim is usually weaker than the bully. A multitude of reasons exists for bullying, with race, gender, physical and mental disabilities, intellectual giftedness, and real or perceived sexual orientation being among the most common causes.

Although most people are familiar with physical bullying, bullying can take on another serious form that is not as obvious. Although the focus has traditionally been placed on the impact of the physical realm, psychological bullying has been shown to have serious effects as well. Psychological bullying may take place in the forms of exclusion and ostracism as well as verbal harassment. Due to the nature of the attacks, psychological bullying is far less noticeable to adults and considerably more difficult to punish due to the lack of evidence.

Regardless of the form that it may take, bullying is a serious problem. While there are obvious social, emotional, and academic impacts, the effects of bullying victimization of

traditional bullying can last much longer. Bullying victimization, especially in severe cases, may last for well over a decade after the end of the phenomenon (Olweus, 1993b).

**Social effects of traditional bullying.** Traditional forms of bullying have a dramatic effect on socialization. Olweus (1993a) found that bullied children tend to become socially isolated and look to adults to find a social connection. Children excluded in peer groups, although they may find adult interaction, are less likely to participate in class activities as a result of their social exclusion (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006). Social exclusion may also result in the desire to avoid social interaction that could possibly lead to interaction with bullies altogether, including missing school intentionally (Boulton & Hawker, 1997; Rigby, 1996).

Social exclusion associated with psychological bullying may drive a serious sense of belonging. Social exclusion may drive victims to actively seek needed social experiences through any means possible. Excluded students may move toward acceptance through the adoption of problem behaviors or be driven toward suicidal thoughts if they cannot achieve socialization (Van der Wal, de Wit, & Hirasing, 2003).

**Emotional effects of traditional bullying.** Traditional forms of bullying can take a tremendous toll on victims. The physical or psychological abuse that victims endure can cause them to question their self-worth and personal values. Studies have shown that victims have lower self-esteem, increased rates of depression, and anxiety in comparison to their peers that have not been bullied physically or psychologically (Olweus, 1993a; Hodges & Perry, 1996).

When the effects of low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety are combined, the results on the psychological state of the individual can be overwhelming. Many bullying victims contemplate suicide (Rigby, 1996) and, sadly, some follow through on their thoughts and take their own lives. Van der wal et al. (2003) added an interesting twist to the picture of suicidal

tendencies with their findings that victims of psychological bullying tended to exhibit more traits of depression and harbored thoughts of suicide at a higher rate than victims of physical bullying. The ramification of the findings of Van der wal et al. (2003), while focused on traditional forms, shed a great deal of light on the phenomenon of cyberbullying as it is entirely psychological in nature.

**Academic effects of traditional bullying.** Based partly on the increased absenteeism associated with the social effects of bullying (Boulton & Hawker, 1997; Rigby, 1996), educators and researchers have assumed a connection exists between victimization and academics. In addition, students that are bullied at school are distracted while in class over what may have happened before class and what may happen afterward.

Even though the connection with academic trouble may be based on solid theory, Kowalski et al. (2008) cautioned jumping to conclusions on the ground that most research in the area is simply based on correlational studies. While they have found that a correlation exists, the methodology of correlational research in quantitative studies stops short of seeking a causal relationship. While a relationship may very well exist, it has yet to be indicated through any causal-comparative study.

### **Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is a new and extremely threatening behavior impacting young people. Early examples of cyberbullying began to appear in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the methods of attack became available. Cyberbullying has been linked to specific instances of school violence. One early example involves Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. Infamous for the Columbine Massacre, records have shown that the duo was involved in cyberbullying before that

violent incident (Keith & Martin, 2005). While no cyberbullying cases have reached that level of violence since, educators must still consider the practice a serious threat.

The rapid increase in technology revealed several new methods for bullying. For most young people, the new technologies were easily accessible and easy to use. In addition to the constant connection, the methods were often unknown by adults or done away from their supervision (Keith & Martin, 2005; Shariff, 2008). In fact, Keith and Martin (2005) found that most parents believed that their child could never do anything as mean as cyberbullying, but they found that the parental confidence was often not based on reality.

**Research studies on cyberbullying.** Cyberbullying is a topic that is still in the infancy stage in terms of knowledge and research, leading to inadequacies in several areas (Kowalski et al., 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Tokunaga, 2010). The topic is so new that researchers even seem to disagree on whether correct spelling of the term should be cyberbullying or cyber bullying. With the disagreement going as shallow as spelling, a precise definition is nearly impossible to identify. For cyberbullying researchers, the primary issue in defining cyberbullying is whether the terminology should focus on specific trends or maintain a broad and less specific format.

Kowalski et al. (2008) stated that ten years ago, books and research on the topic of cyberbullying would have been deemed pointless and irrelevant. In 2008, information and research concerning cyberbullying was appearing so fast that researchers found it difficult to finish ongoing research due to their desire to include the new research findings (Shariff, 2008). Even with the disagreements on the surface, the field of research and studies on the topic of cyberbullying seem to concur in several areas.



Cyberbullies have a strong sense of anonymity while online, and feel as though there are no punishments connected to bullying in cyberspace. Beckerman and Nocero (2003) found that “what makes this form of bullying problematic is the difficulty authorities have in correctly identifying the perpetrator and the determination of what role, if any, the school should play in this area” (p.38). Cyberbullying incidents are indeed something that many schools are attempting to address. In some schools, the problem is not as well identified. Li (2006a) found that some educators and administrators realize the threat that bullying poses to their schools, but many are unaware that electronic bullying is an issue. However, the rising incidence of cyberbullying and its level of severity have many experts calling for all educational professionals and researchers to address this growing problem much more thoroughly (Li, 2006a).

Teen victims of cyberbullying can experience strong emotions. Teens have reported becoming angry, hurt, embarrassed, and scared due to cyberbullying. The effects of victimization on the victims of cyberbullying may be worse than traditional bullying, especially considering they are being embarrassed in front of a much larger audience and the fact that there is no place to hide from cyberbullies (Kowalski et al., 2008). An increasing number of cyberbullying activities take place on school campuses, and many others carry over onto school campuses in the form of violence and distraction from academic tasks. Violence associated with cyberbullying can be severe, with recorded cases of children killing themselves or others over cyberbullying incidents.

Studies consistently find that the threat of cyberbullying is considerable and constantly growing in terms of peer attacks. Literature is lacking in the levels of attacks against authority figures, but the number of students impacted by cyberbullying is at dangerous levels today. Research studies vary in their findings. Percentages of children cyberbullied range from 4% to

53% in recent years (Kowalski et al., 2008). With variance issues in studies ranging from 6.5% (Ybarra, 2004) to a high of 71% (Juvonen & Gross, 2008), it is difficult for researchers to explain the disparities. While researchers are unsure of the precise reason for victimization levels that seem to vary from different studies, the cause may be found in the lack of a concise and consistent definition (Tokunaga, 2010).

In one of the largest studies to date, Patchin and Hinduja (2006) found 29% were victims of cyberbullying. Mason (2008) provided support for Patchin and Hinduja's (2006) finding by confirming that large studies consistently place the overall percentage of cyberbullying victims between 20-40%. Even if educational leaders assume that the surveys found 30% of adolescent children are being cyberbullied, educational professionals must consider that the problem is large enough to be actively addressed for student psychological health and possibly academic concerns (Li, 2006a).

New forms of cyberbullying are appearing as the world becomes more interconnected. The media has vilified many sites such as MySpace, however, only a small percentage of their members have actually been harmed and that harm usually is a result of the naïve usage of the new technologies such as altering the security settings and placing personal information online without the thought of how the information may be utilized (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). Schools must be very concerned about the naivety of their students and the implications that cyberbullying may have on them as well as the violence that can carry over onto school campuses. Many schools are already reacting by banning the possession and use of cell phones, which may be used to send text messages that ridicule, threaten or harass others (Pickett & Thomas, 2006).

Many schools have seen cyberbullying studies in their area and are beginning to react. The growing number of incidents and the severity of cyberbullying are making the issue too difficult for educators, administrators, researchers, and legal authorities to dismiss the problem any longer (Li, 2006a). Unfortunately, not all schools understand the depth of the problem in their district or school grounds due to gaps in the research or the digital divide that separates digital natives and digital immigrants (Prensky 2001b).

Researchers agree that educational professionals must actively address the impact that cyberbullying has on schools. The threats to school security and student health are simply too strong to ignore (Li, 2006a; Smith et al., 2008; Li, 2010). Several recommendations are available for schools to investigate, and some parts of previously implemented reform measures can help prevent cyberbullying. Schools that already implement traditional plans to combat bullying can easily adapt those plans to include cyberbullying prevention (Kowalski et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2008). Those who do not currently implement some form of bullying prevention programs would have to decide whether or not the issue is prevalent enough to warrant the implementation of such a program in their schools. While researchers may agree that the problem is serious and that all schools need to prevent these problems, there are issues with the breadth of the published research that may cause educational leaders to delay the process in their particular schools.

**Gender.** Gender is an area of great debate in the realm of cyberbullying and victimization. Quantitative research, while well researched in the area of gender, has proved inconclusive to this point. Females endure considerably more cyberbullying on the basis of sexual attacks (Shariff, 2008). Outside of attacks of a sexual nature, some studies have found that females are more likely to be victims of cyberbullying (Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008; Li, 2006a; Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, & Tippett, 2008) and are statistically more

likely to be cyberbullies (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). However, gender as a factor outside of the sexual arena has proven to be a complicated area and other studies clouded the picture of gender as a predictor of cyberbullying behavior.

In contrast to the findings that females are more likely to be cyberbullying victims, Li (2006b) found no difference in the likelihood of victimization, but found that males were more likely to be cyberbullies with a statistically significant value of  $p=0.028$ . In one case study, Smith et al. (2008) used a two group study and found one group to be statistically significant for female victimization while another group showed no statistical difference. No explanation was offered on why the findings were different, possibly because there is no clear-cut explanation. With the contrasting results, Smith et al. (2008) simply chose to discuss gender with a belief that the findings for gender contained a great deal of uncertainty. In terms of victimization, the findings of Li (2006b) and Tokunaga (2010) are in concurrence with the argument of uncertainty.

**Avenues of attack.** Before the issue of cyberbullying victimization and the possible impact that it may have on academic achievement can be understood, one must understand the methods of attack associated with cyberbullying victimization. Cyberbullying can be expressed through such behaviors as flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing and trickery, exclusion/ostracism, cyber stalking, and happy slapping/hopping (Kowalski et al., 2008). Most of these methods can be done through a variety of sources and each form has proven to be an effective means in which attacks may be generated.

Cyberbullying can be initiated through several different avenues of attack, and may come in any of the forms described above. Many avenues of attack are currently in use and will be described below, but other forms that are nonexistent presently may develop in the future.

Judging by the speed of technological change, adolescent abilities to initiate cyberbullying will continually change as well. While all of these avenues of attack are currently in use, some have been proven to be far more popular than others.

**Text messaging.** Text messaging is done through cell phones and personal digital assistants. Ironically, the very devices that parents provide to children to insure their safety can be used to harm them (Keith & Martin, 2005). Messages can be sent to anyone with messaging capability, and are sometimes malicious. Most children are now familiar with what is referred to as texting others, and they know texting can be used to harass others. Most of this form of harassment is from students who are already familiar with the victim, since one must know the phone number of the person to whom the text message is sent. Text messaging is commonplace anywhere cellular telephones are taken, and they are often carried at school. The messages can be received in class by students who carry their phones, and can result in instantaneous fights. Many schools have chosen to forbid students from carrying cellular telephones to school for this very reason.

**Email .** Often, those who personally know their victim choose to use their email to attack them. Email can be used for false impersonation by those familiar with the source, as bullies can use an email address and password of the victim to send out harmful messages to their contacts or buddy lists. Impersonation can lead directly to ostracism and exclusion as the friends of the victim believe that the victim sent the hurtful message to them. This often leads to a loss of those friendships (Kowalski et al., 2008). Email messages are also often used to harass the victims with repetitive instances of harmful or threatening messages. This can often fit the definition of cyber stalking as many cases can become prolonged and obsessive.

**Instant messaging.** Instant messaging is one method that allows people to create private chats. In this method, the cyberbully initiates a chat with someone who they dislike. They often choose to send hateful or threatening messages to those they have targeted. Another avenue of attack through instant messaging is trickery. For example, the victim may be tricked into giving out personal information or discussing embarrassing information. The bully often reveals the information to a larger audience through another avenue of attack, causing the victim considerable embarrassment because of the shared information. The repercussions of bullying through instant messaging often result in violent acts when the participants meet face to face, and often occur at school (Belsey, 2008).

**Social networking.** Many popular social networking websites present an easy avenue for cyberbullies to attack. On these Internet sites, anyone can create pages that can be used to attack others. Virtual communities such as MySpace and Facebook provide an easy way to attack others through the use of their personal pages or the creation of false sites under the names of the intended victim. Although MySpace and Facebook are well known through infamous stories about the creation of false pages for cyberbullying purposes, there are many other forums where these attacks may occur. Creating a homepage that is supposedly maintained by the victim often leads to the serious problem of denigration and impersonation.

False homepages are a serious phenomenon, and are usually created by people familiar with the victim using their name. These sites can be easily circulated through common lists of friends and contacts within the school and can contain troubling content, such as insults directed towards the victim's set of friends. Other false sites have caused harm by placing altered photographs online to cause embarrassment to a substantially wider audience than a scholastic setting allows. Virtual community attacks are posted for anyone to see in an attempt to embarrass

victims on a larger basis. Larger sites such as MySpace and Facebook have installed multiple safety devices to protect their members, but studies have found that adolescents often change the default settings, opening the way for possible attacks.

**Video sharing.** Video sharing sites have given an opportunity for bullies to turn their acts into personal fame. The beating of Victoria Lindsay is a prime example of happy slapping and hopping. The technique of hopping, a variant of happy slapping, takes place when one person is beaten while being filmed by friends of those who are bullying the victim with the intention of posting the incident online (Kowalski et al., 2008). Children who Lindsay believed to be friends not only beat her badly, but filmed the event and posted it on You Tube in a case of severe cyber bullying. Incidents recorded on YouTube often results in the continuous suffering of a victim even after the initial event, due to the popularity of watching fighting videos on sharing sites (Willard, 2009). The Lindsay case became national news. Even though girls were arrested, they got their fame.

**Chat Rooms.** Internet chat rooms pose several serious problems. Some chat rooms are known as bash boards and are Internet areas where cyberbullies may go to and post basically anything they choose. These areas are not censored to protect those under attack, nor are they checked for accuracy. The lack of accuracy checks often result in denigration. As in social networking, bullies often choose to post false or derogatory information or photos of victims. Some of this information has been known to be digitally altered to give the impression of lewd or sexual acts, online for everyone to see (Kowalski et al., 2008). Chat room bullies often take on screen names that do not give away their true identities. They sometimes blame the postings on other people through the cover of another person or an anonymous source.

### **Severity of Cyberbullying**

**The influence of anonymity.** Studies have found that the anonymous nature of cyberbullying attacks have serious repercussions on the nature and perception of the phenomenon. Cyberbullies operate without the fear of getting caught due to the adoption of online screen names (Calvete, Orue, Estevez, Villardon, & Padilla 2010; Shariff, 2008). The idea of an identity shield in a screen name empowers students to believe that they are not held responsible for online actions, leading to a removal of traditional moral and social restraints. The removal of moral and social restraints, along with the elimination of the fear of being punished, leads to a disinhibition effect that allows the bullies to become much more vicious and direct without the fear of being caught (Kowalski et al., 2008; Mason, 2008).

The removal of traditional social roles and the resulting disinhibition effect allows online bullies to behave differently than in a normal social setting, especially without the constraints of the typical morality of traditional social settings (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Li, 2007a, Li, 2007b). If the loss of morality in traditional bullies and the resulting increase in vicious attacks online were not enough, the loss of inhibitions can go further. The difference in settings also draws in students who would typically not engage in bullying behaviors. The removal of moral and ethical constraints encourages some to engage in this behavior in a seemingly anonymous new social setting (Tokunaga, 2010).

**Lack of a safe haven.** Traditional bullying victims absorbed the majority of their torment in school and social settings. When the school day ended, the victim often looked forward to a return to the safety and protection of the home. While the psychological repercussions of bullying remained, at least the home environment provided a temporary safe haven where the victim could feel secure and out of the reach of tormenters.



Cyberbullying represents a drastic departure from the traditional safe haven. Technological innovations have now extended the school grounds into an entirely different arena that supports bullying around the clock (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Kowalski et al., 2008; Mason, 2008). Victims cannot find a tangible location to avoid the attacks, causing additional strain. In addition, the attacks can continue regardless of whether the victim chooses to be present (Shariff, 2008). The persistent nature of the attacks may explain why some researchers believe cyberbullying to be more severe than traditional forms (Tokunaga, 2010).

### **Social effects of cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying victimization can seriously impact the social well-being of students. Depending upon their personality and perception of the situation, victims may choose to react in several different ways. While some choose to ignore the incident, others tend to have more serious reactions such as withdrawing socially, seeking revenge on the bully, or becoming a cyberbully themselves (National Crime Prevention Council, 2008).

Cyberbullying victims often encounter difficulties in establishing and maintaining positive social relationships. The very nature of cyberbullying victimization can cause serious embarrassment and psychological uncertainty. The social uncertainty in the lives of students can lead to general social rejection and exclusion (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007a). Social rejection, or even the possibility of rejection, can lead to violent outbursts in order to attempt to overcome social embarrassment.

Cyberbullying victims often choose to use violence to save face in their social reactions to cyberbullying. School environments are often impacted as many acts of reactionary violence take place on school campuses. Violence associated with cyberbullying can be severe both on

and off campuses, with recorded cases of children killing themselves or others over cyberbullying incidents (Keith & Martin, 2005).

### **Emotional effects of cyberbullying**

Media accounts covering the emotional turmoil experienced by cyberbullying victims indicate that the emotions can be overwhelming for adolescents. The intense emotions that cyberbullying victims experience can lead to serious emotional and psychological problems ranging from self-harm to difficulty eating (Mason, 2008). The severity of the reaction of victims is related to the nature of the attack, with the severity, regularity, and duration of the attack being key indicators to the severity of their reaction (Smith et al., 2008; Tokunaga, 2010).

Psychological reactions by the victims of cyberbullying may be worse than traditional bullying, especially considering the tremendous audience and the lack of a safe haven (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). In strikingly similar findings to studies focused on the victims of traditional bullying, victims of cyberbullying have been found to have lower self-esteem, elevated measures of depression, and suicidal tendencies (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000; Tokunaga, 2010; Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2006; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006). Several well known cases have resulted in suicide, drawing attention to the subject of cyberbullying and speaking to the severity of psychological bullying as potentially more harmful than traditional physical bullying (Keith & Martin, 2005; Van der wal, 2003).

### **Academic effects of cyberbullying**

Many research studies have included findings that indicate academic problems arise from cyberbullying victimization. Among these studies are reports of student grades dropping suddenly (Beran & Li, 2007), increased student delinquency (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007a), escalation of student absences (Katzner, Fetchenhauer, & Belshack, 2009), and generally poor

academic performance (Mason, 2008). In one major discrepant finding, Li (2007a) reported that cyberbullying victimization was unrelated to grades. Tokunaga (2010) argued that Li's (2007a) finding could have been caused by survey choices that are only based on three point scale that does not allow for a quantitatively descriptive analysis of the event. However, the discrepancy revealed by Li (2007a) added an element of uncertainty in the area of cyberbullying and grades.

Many of the documented psychological behaviors could very well cause academic problems to appear. Although the sources are generally quick to make a connection, little quantitative evidence exists to suggest a firm and specific connection to serious academic problems. With the lack of evidence and contradiction, the connection between cyberbullying victimization and academic success is based more on the connection to statistical indications of problem behaviors that indicate academic struggles than direct empirical evidence.

### **Coping with Victimization**

Although numbers as high as 26% have reported to have done nothing in response (Patchin & Hindjua, 2006), most victims of cyberbullying have some reaction to their violation. Unfortunately, most studies report that less than 10% tell adults about their victimization in the United States (Dehue et al, 2006; Tokunaga, 2010). While little research in the qualitative realm exists to give a deeper understanding, quantitative studies have indicated that students generally believe that adults will not be able to solve the problem, that it would simply cause the problem to get worse, or that they may lose their Internet privileges. Although most studies echo those fears by finding large numbers, Li (2006a) found that 34% reported cyberbullying victimization in a study of Canadian students in a large western city. While the Li (2006a) study did not take place in the United States, the cultural similarities bring into question the accuracy of the studies that found considerably lower numbers of reporting to adults. The unusually high findings also

conflict with Li's (2008) finding of a 9% victim report rate in western Canada, a figure much more in line with the prevalent numbers across the United States (Dehue et al, 2006; Tokunaga, 2010).

Rather than turn to adults in a manner that they consider to be childish, cyberbullying victims tend to turn to their friends for help at a rate of 36-46% (Slonje & Smith, 2007; Topcu, Erdur-Baker, & Capa-Aydin, 2008). While the number of students that turn to friends is considerably more than those who choose to report to adults, the number may be influenced by cultural differences as reported in the Turkish and Swedish studies rather than inside the United States. Li's (2008) study provides a justification for further research in each nation on coping by revealing statistically significant figures in different cultures. Students may turn to friends in order to receive support and comfort from another source familiar with cyberbullying instead of potentially exacerbating the problem by turning the attacker in to authority figures who are perceived to be lacking in cyber knowledge and lacking the desire to address the issue (Li, 2010).

Typically, the most common method of addressing cyberbullying victimization was to restrict messages or block screen names. Many students wish to take matters into their own hands, but many hope that the victimization will simply end without any further embarrassment or public notice. Studies have found rates as high as 75% in the choice to block cyberbullies, primarily because it does not require retaliation, attention, or physical confrontation that many cyberbullying victims would rather avoid (Smith et al., 2008).

Victims may choose to react in negative ways to protect themselves and their reputations. Li (2006a) found that almost half of cyberbullying victims reported being bullies or cyberbullies themselves, indicating that victims often cope by becoming cyberbullies themselves. Victims

may also choose to react by directly confronting their attacker, often leading to disturbances or fights (Kowalski et al.; Shariff, 2008).

Unfortunately, some victims cannot find a way to effectively cope with cyberbullying. National attention has been drawn to the subject of cyberbullying because of students such as Megan Meier and Phoebe Prince. While victims may wish to avoid adults and handle the problem themselves, their choice often results in tragedy. The dreadful result in many cases covered by the media has led to a desire to understand and address coping strategies before the issue becomes overwhelming.

### **Reporting**

While educators generally understand and accept traditional bullying as an underreported phenomenon, cyberbullying has proven to be even more elusive. Cyberbullying is rarely reported to adults by American students, often at rates below 5% in major studies (Dehue et al., 2008; Li, 2010). While American students are reluctant to report cyberbullying to adults, Li (2008) found that 9% of Canadian students reported cyberbullying victimization and 66% of Chinese students reported cyberbullying victimization. The overwhelming disparity between levels of reporting may be explained by cultural differences between the societies, but certainly warrants further investigation.

The reasoning behind the lack of reporting is unclear. Students have expressed several reasons for their lack of reporting, but no extensive studies have been conducted to determine the extent or depth of the existing student statements. Li (2010) found that many students believed that authorities would not believe them. In another study, students have expressed the feeling that authority figures are unable to do anything to help them even if they did report (Smith et al., 2008).

Unfortunately, students may be thinking accurately in regards to the inability of many authority figures to take the correct course of action. The relatively new appearance of cyberbullying may have taken school leaders by surprise, and many are yet to fully understand the nature of the problem or the concept of socialization in cyberspace due to a generational disconnect in relation to technology (Prensky, 2001a; Prensky 2001b; Trolley, Hanel, & Shields, 2006). Coupled with the findings of Li (2006a) that most school leaders did not consider cyberbullying to be a problem, the problem with the digital disconnect is particularly unsettling.

The perceptions of students may be grounded in the behavior and general lack of understanding of prior generations in relation to cyberspace and cyber socialization. In order to achieve an increase in reporting, school leaders need to achieve a greater understanding of the severity of cyberbullying victimization as well as the nature of attacks and student reactions. A greater understanding of technological trends and greater communication with students may alleviate the concern of Li (2010) that educational leaders are ill equipped to deal with cyberbullying in the eyes of students. In order to improve the rates of reporting, schools should open up the gates of communication by actively implementing prevention plans and acceptable use policies in their schools (Li, 2006a). Regardless of the reasoning, the reluctance of American students to report cyberbullying victimization is disturbing and in need of a greater focus of both qualitative and quantitative inquiry.

### **Impact on Schools**

Cyberbullying threatens students, therefore schools must be concerned. The vast majority of cyberbullying cases take place away from the schools due to the increase in connectivity once classes conclude. Some leaders may incorrectly assume cyberbullying to be beyond their control and a minor issue in the school day. The growing number of incidents and the severity of

cyberbullying attacks are making cyberbullying too difficult for educators, administrators, researchers, and legal authorities to dismiss the problem any longer (Li, 2006a).

Cyberbullying has been linked to specific disruptions in many schools. In some cases, cyberbullying begins with disruptions in the school environment (Shariff, 2008). Confrontations at school that remain unresolved can proceed into cyberbullying as one of the participants in a disagreement takes out their frustration by threatening or embarrassing the other participant through the use of the various technological methods to harass or embarrass the other (Kowalski, et al., 2008; Shariff, 2008). Upon their next meeting, the situation could easily become another physical confrontation as the problems between the two parties continue to fester in cyberspace, even after the original incident was long over.

While all incidents do not always have violent ramifications within the schools, students are harmed by victimization and their personal choices in dealing with the ramifications. In extreme examples, students such as 13 year olds Ryan Patrick Halligan and Megan Meier can be driven to commit suicide because of persistent online harassment (Kowalski et al., 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). If the goal of schools is to protect the school environment as well as their students, educational leaders can no longer ignore or downplay the threats involved, even if they occur mostly outside of the school environment. The ramifications of indifference are simply too strong when young lives are potentially at stake. It is the responsibility of the school to concern itself with the academic progress of its students (Li, 2006a).

### **Prevention**

New forms of cyberbullying are constantly appearing as the world becomes more interconnected. All stakeholders must become involved with the prevention and spread of cyberbullying (Shariff, 2008), and many websites have been created to inform people about and

prevent these harmful acts. Schools must be concerned about cyberbullying both for the impact on their students as well as the violence that can carry over onto school campuses (Li, 2006a).

Schools are in a unique situation with cyberbullying, as there are many aspects that are beyond the traditional controls of the school. Schools can ban the use and carrying of cellular telephones on campus to eliminate text messaging and harassing calls, but educational leaders often feel helpless beyond the physical environment. Schools that allow cellular telephones sometimes choose to enforce regulations on them such as banning the use of video and picture taking during fights (Willard, 2009).

Schools must do what they can to protect the health and academic success of their students (Li, 2006a). The most reliable way to do that is to have a good acceptable technology use agreement signed by students and parents that contains a clause concerning dangerous and abusive actions by one student toward another student (Aftab, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). With this signed agreement in hand, schools can punish students for abusive actions against their peers regardless of the timing and location of their actions (Aftab, 2008).

Cyberbullying has been identified as a threat to students and the school environment in several districts. In those areas, schools have software in place that monitors Internet activity by their students. The software chosen by some schools not only monitors Internet activity, but also links to student records and reports to school counselors (Stroud, 2009). Schools have increasingly reported activities in cyberbullying to law enforcement in their area. Resulting punishments act as proof that the Internet is not a place without legal ramifications (Feinberg & Robey, 2009). Schools have also made hotlines available for cyberbullying victims to call in hopes of raising the rate of reporting of cyberbullying cases (Stroud, 2009).



Schools are currently searching for a means to prepare students to be able to resolve conflicts rather than resorting to violence or harm to others through traditional bullying prevention programs. In light of the increase in school violence worldwide and the increasing threat of cyberbullying, researchers have suggested that schools should consider educating students in peaceful conflict resolution focusing on cyberbullying as well as traditional forms (Dehue et al., 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2007a). In order to peacefully resolve conflicts, schools must find ways to address the new technologies that can deliver too much virtual harm before face to face resolution can become possible. Schools should carefully consider their approach to those items that they are able to regulate or ban on campus while doing all things possible to inform parents and communities of the increasing threat of cyberbullying.

Educators complain that parents disregard messages sent from the school. Even though many warnings may fall on deaf ears, there are still parents who heed the warning signals sent by schools. Educational leaders should look to take advantage of those parents by communicating the findings of research on cyberbullying as well as additional helpful information to clue parents into what their children are doing or saying. For example, Belsey (2008) included an extensive set of acronyms in his webpage that parents and teachers can access to help them understand online discussions being held by children. Although it may seem like a trivial detail, communication of information such as this by schools can give parents vital information into understanding the actions of their child online as well as what others may be saying to or about them.

### **Gaps in the Research**

One major problem with the current studies on cyberbullying is that they are all conducted in larger cities or through quantitative Internet surveys. While many of the studies

share the same findings, none of them seem to address the influence of cyberbullying in rural areas. The studies also seem to be primarily conducted in foreign countries and among cities in the northern United States. Lack of data on the southern United States, particularly in the rural South, has led to no significant findings on whether the problem of cyberbullying is worth addressing as a major issue threatening rural Southern schools. While researchers may make generalizations from their research that encourage these schools to implement changes, many educational leaders may wish to see specific data analysis to support those generalizations before they implement such changes in their schools.

The research has indicated cyberbullying to be a problem in several major cities and in other nations, but no research has been conducted in the rural areas. While the concentration on more densely populated areas gives researchers an idea of the extent of cyberbullying issues, research does little to give educators in rural areas an idea of the magnitude of the problem in their setting. Traditionally, rural and urban areas have many significantly different concerns and problems. Improvements in information technology may have bridged that traditional gap, impacting students in small towns in the same ways that larger cities experience. Until further research is done in rural settings, educators will continue to question whether or not cyberbullying is a problem that they must actively address.

While considerable research has been conducted in the middle schools, little research has been conducted on high school students or graduates. Experienced educators understand that students go through a tremendous transition between the middle school and secondary years, and their behaviors inside and outside of the classroom reflect those considerable changes. While there are several studies that encompassed both the late middle school and early high school years, the vast majority of the studies conclude with the freshman year in high school. The

middle grades focus of most cyberbullying studies is suspect, especially when so many news stories and well-known accounts of violence are related to cyberbullying occurrences in high school students such as Victoria Lindsay and Dylan Klebold (Keith & Martin, 2005).

When comparing the mindsets of adults and young people, Shariff (2008) found a serious gap in the mindsets of the two in relation to technology and the transfer of information. Shariff (2008) discussed the adult perception of technology from a utilitarian perspective based on general accommodation in contrast to a perception youth have of technology as fluid and having a general sense of relativism in meaning based on the individual. The finding of Shariff (2008) aligns well with the digital divide between digital immigrants and digital natives described by Prensky (2001a).

Following Prensky's (2001a) finding on the conceptual divide between digital natives and digital immigrants, Shariff's conclusion could easily transfer to the problem of cyberbullying. Unfortunately, there are no studies that explain and elaborate on the severity of the problem of cyberbullying victimization in adolescents in words that can be understood by professional adults. Given the unique focus of this paper in bridging miscommunication between generations, it would be interesting to know how serious educators, administrators, and students perceive the problem of cyberbullying to be in their schools. If a gap in the serious nature of cyberbullying exists, it should indicate that educators and administrators may be either seriously overestimating or underestimating the severity of the problem.

Research is also lacking in respect to what educators, administrators and students feel should be done to address the problem. Experts such as Aftab (2008b) have suggested stronger acceptable use policies, but it is uncertain how many schools feel that their policies are strictly and consistently enforced in situations that take place off campus. Following the lack of

information in this area, it would be important to gain an understanding of what other, if any, methods that schools are actually implementing to prevent future occurrences of cyberbullying.

The most pressing question associated with cyberbullying involves the impact that victimization may have on academic achievement. Cyberbullying victimization has a definite impact on student mental health (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000; Tokunaga, 2010; Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2006; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006). While a relationship has often been inferred as creating a relationship with achievement, no extensive research studies have been conducted to determine whether a correlation exists. With the increased focus on the academic achievement of every student under the No Child Left Behind Act, schools would not be able to ignore the problem in good conscience if a correlation was indicated through research.

### **Summary**

While cyberbullying researchers report inconsistent findings in frequency (Juvoven & Gross, 2008; Kowalski et al., 2008; Patchin & Hinduja 2006; Ybarra, 2004) and definition (Shariff & Strong-Wilson, 2005; Shariff, 2008), consistency is found in the impact on students (Li, 2006a; Tokunaga, 2010). Researchers are clearly concerned for the social, emotional, and academic health of cyberbullying victims. In addition, researchers are increasingly concerned about the repercussions of online victimization when victims return to school with revenge in mind (Kowalski et al., 2008; Tokunaga, 2010).

While quantitative data has caused the concerns to rise among researchers, the voices of the victims hold the key to unveiling the intricate details of the development and manifestation of cyberbully/cyberbullying victim relationship. This study seeks to find answers to address those concerns from the participants' perspective concerning their personal lived experience. The study seeks to bridge the digital divide and contribute to the field by reporting the findings in a manner

that will lead to a greater understanding among educational leaders.

Identification of the origin of the cyberbully/cyberbullying victim relationship and the manifestation of the relationship is the first step to preventing a potentially devastating act. Once the key aspects of the relationship are developed through qualitative research, a bridge can be constructed that connects the needs of cyberbullying victims with the protective capabilities of educational leaders that currently misinterpret the extent of the problem (Li, 2006a) because of a digital divide between generations widened by the Information Age (Prensky, 2001a).

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

Quantitative research demonstrates that cyberbullying is a significant problem (Kowalski et al., 2008; Li, 2006a; Shariff, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). While statistics suggest that is a common practice that may lead to serious psychological, social, and academic issues, quantitative research alone cannot elaborate on the manifestation of the cyberbullying/cyberbullying victim relationship. Qualitative research in the area is needed to achieve a greater understanding of cyberbullying victimization and the effects of victimization through the lens of their individual perspectives.

This study seeks to understand how cyberbullying manifests itself in the well being of participants. Quantitative studies clearly demonstrate a link between cyberbullying victimization and emotional, social, and academic harm (Kowalski et al., 2008; Li, 2006; Shariff, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). While the quantitative evidence indicates that a correlation exists, it does not fully explain the reason for the correlation from the perspective of the victim and the intricate nature of when and how the cyberbully/cyberbullying victim relationship develops and how it manifests itself in the life of the cyberbullying victim.

In order to fully understand the effects of cyberbullying victimization on students, researchers must look deeper into the personal perspective of victims of online victimization. A deeper understanding requires a transition from etic quantitative data into emic qualitative data, which will allow educational leaders to understand the emotional and psychological mindset of the participant within their particular social setting (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). While the existing quantitative studies demonstrate a correlation, this study is aimed at forming a

clear picture of what it feels like to be a victim of cyberbullying and the implications of victimization on the lives of the participants.

### **Research Design**

This is a qualitative inquiry performed through a phenomenological design. Phenomenology is a research method that utilizes voice to make meaning of the phenomena through the goal of understanding the phenomena from the participants' perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In this case, I listened to the voices of cyberbullying victims and worked to translate their individual voices into a cohesive format that can be better understood by a significantly wider audience of educational leaders who are digitally disconnected from the mindset of digital natives (Prensky, 2001a).

In order to achieve the translation to a wider audience, this study implemented the hermeneutic approach of van Manen (1990). The hermeneutic approach provides a rigorous foundation for study within the social world of the individual participant (Tan, Wilson, & Olver, 2009). Using the data that were gathered, I worked to translate the voices of the student victims to an audience of adults who have trouble connecting with the complex issues surrounding the nature of cyberspace (Prensky 2001a; 2001b).

With the severe reactions that have come to be associated with cyberbullying through major news stories, research cannot underestimate the digital disconnect resulting from familiarity with technology. As recently as 2006, studies indicated that while educational administrators understood the issue of school bullying, few were even aware students were being bullied through electronic communication methods (Li, 2006a). The findings of Li (2006a) stands in stark contrast to the estimated victimization rate of 20-40% (Mason, 2008), providing additional justification for the need for a generational bridge in connection to cyberbullying.

Throughout the course of human history, individuals have sought to connect feeling with their personal life experiences through individual expressions in art, philosophy, and linguistic expression (van Manen, 1990). The virtual reality of cyberspace has blurred the lines of reality for digital natives as compared to digital immigrants (Prensky 2001a). The blurred and digitized conceptual reality has increased personal expression online as evidenced by uncensored blogs, personal social networking pages, and individualized avatars. When combined with the disinhibition effect involved in cyberbullying victimization (Kowalski et al., 2008; Mason, 2008), dangerous and severe attacks have increased the sphere and scope of traditional bullying. The digital disconnect created by the speed of the Information Age has created an enhanced need for interpretation of expressions of the lived experience of cyberbullying victims online and offline.

Hermeneutics is a good fit for this study because it allows me to capture the essence of the issues surrounding bullying in cyberspace. Hermeneutics allowed me to investigate the origination and manifestation of the cyberbully/cyberbullying victim relationship in the lived experience of participants and provide a translation for educational leaders. The translation provides for a greater understanding of the effects of cyberbullying victimization to a generation of educational leaders who often fail to understand the nature of cyberspace and the connection of cyberspace to student success and well-being in the lives of digital natives. My goal of providing an understanding is at the very heart of the purpose of phenomenological research according to Bloomberg and Vlope (2008).

### **Participants**

The participants for the study were purposefully chosen because they have been through the shared experience of cyberbullying victimization. The participants involved in the study are



rural high school graduates from 2010-2011 school year. The age range of participants included in the study ranged from 18-19 years of age depending on birthdates and length of time taken to complete school.

Throughout my doctoral program, I have remained loyal to my topic of interest. When asked, I have told students of my topic. Many of my students have responded by saying that it was an important topic and that they had been cyberbullying victims. At the time, I thanked them for their comments, reassured them that I was committed to addressing the issue, and told them to report any details to the guidance counselor or the office since I was not prepared to address their issues. Although I did not know any details of their experience, I clearly remembered their identities since their comments were relevant to my research topic. The participants were selected because of the information that they have shared with me concerning the fact that they had been victimized.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, school leaders are reluctant to allow research with current students. For my research, that issue can be addressed by looking to the recent past. Several of the students who informed me of their own cyberbullying victimization graduated in the 2010-2011 school year. After they graduated and I obtained IRB approval, I invited those students to participate in the gathering of qualitative data through interviews and journal writings. While some concern may exist in using older participants who are past that stage in their lives, a similar problem would exist in interviewing 12<sup>th</sup> graders who were victimized in their 10<sup>th</sup> grade year. While it is a concern, research demonstrates that clear memories of bullying victimization may last for well over a decade after the end of the phenomenon (Olweus, 1993).

For the purpose of this study, the number of participants in the study remained relatively small. A total of 8 recent graduates participated in the study, all sharing the common experience

of cyberbullying victimization. Five of the participants were 18 years of age and three were 19 years of age. Six of the participants identified themselves as White, one as Native American, and one as African-American. The study was comprised of four males and four females. Focusing on a small number of participants allowed for a deep and thorough investigation of the experience of each victim rather than a narrow investigation of larger numbers. Due to the limited background of cyberbullying research, a deep investigation is necessary to formulate an understanding of the participants' perspective for the analysis of data and communication of participant perspective through hermeneutic writing (van Manen, 1990).

### **Setting**

The selected site is a small high school in southwest Georgia. The site was selected to fill in gaps in the research where rural schools and secondary students are not typically the focus of cyberbullying research. The town and the area where the high school is located depend largely on agricultural and agricultural industries for survival, and the population of the town is relatively stable, maintaining a population relatively close to the 3898 counted in the 2010 census. The school employs 36 teachers, 2 administrators, 1 guidance counselor and an office staff of 2 additional employees. The high school selected for the study is the only high school in the district.

Although the population of the school fluctuates slightly, the 2011 statistics counted 422 students in grades 9-12. The selected site has a student population of 46% Caucasian, 48% African-American, 5% Hispanic, and 1% Asian-American. The school is considered to be a low socioeconomic school with 60% of the student population considered as economically disadvantaged as compared with a 50% state average in Georgia.

In order to maintain the disinhibition effect online, a departure from traditional methods of data collection in the physical realm is necessary. Mason's (2010) finding that cyberspace users depart from traditional patterns and act in a different manner online due to anonymity is an important aspect of behavior online. In an attempt to harness disinhibition in a positive manner, online sites were utilized for the transfer of data where only I knew the identity of participants. Focus groups were conducted in the virtual reality setting of cyberspace in Second Life, a setting where voice, writing, and physical expression may be utilized through a chosen anonymous avatar. The blog site Twitter was used to form the journal component of research, utilizing the real-time movement of data and open expression format that digital natives have become so very familiar with while following friends and celebrities around the clock.

### **Data Collection**

After gaining approval from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (Appendix G), I contacted several former students by telephone in order to ask them to participate in the study based on purposive sampling from the former students who previously confided in me that they had been victimized online. After informed consent (Appendix A) was granted, I began the interview phase. Interviews were used as the principal data collection method in order to utilize the words of the participant to give an insight into their perspective of the phenomenon. In the realm of phenomenological research, leading researchers indicate that interviews may effectively constitute the primary method of data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The participants were asked to participate in the study through a process of interviews, journal-style writing conducted through Internet blogs, and anonymous online focus groups.

**Instrumentation.** In order to collect data from participants during the interview and focus group portions of data collection, questions and prompts were created. The questions were

generated based on findings of current quantitative research in the field. Content validity was insured through the grounding of questions in prior studies as detailed in Appendix B.

The questions were checked for face validity through field testing. The field testing of the questions consisted of two phases. In the first phase, questions were checked by specialists in the field possessing doctoral degrees. In the second phase, the questions were posed to an individual who would qualify to be in the study who was not selected to participate. Through the first phase test of face validity, I achieved face validity by using a panel of experts possessing doctoral degrees in the field of education to ensure that the questions clearly asked what they were intended to communicate to the participants. As a final test of face validity, I posed the questions to a recent graduate that would have qualified for the study but did not participate to ensure that questions remain valid in the eyes of victims. The input and suggestions of panel members is detailed in Appendix B.

In order to understand how questions are interpreted, cognitive interviews were conducted during each phase to insure the complete understanding of all questions posed during the entire cognitive process of reading and interpretation (Dillman, Smythe, & Christian, 2009). In the cognitive interview process, field test specialists provided any thoughts that occurred during the reading of each question to insure the accuracy of all questions. Each and every idea that ran through their minds during the question analysis process was considered in providing validity for the questions. Any misunderstandings were noted and questions were modified according to their suggestions before they were posed to participants for data collection. Adjustments were noted and are detailed in parenthetical notations (Appendices D & E).

**Objectivity.** As a qualitative phenomenological researcher in the role of the interviewer, I realized that I play a crucial role in the quality of data gathered (Patton, 2002). In a qualitative

setting, it is vitally important to maintain objectivity and guide questions toward the focus of the study and away from aspects of the study that can serve as distracters. Phenomenological researchers must remain true and faithful guardians of the investigated lived experience of participants while constantly maintaining an awareness of the potential distraction of extraneous elements (van Manen, 1990).

No related qualitative research studies exist in the area of cyberbullying victimization to threaten objectivity prior to the study. Although participants shared the basic information that they had been victimized, I had no additional personal experience or any knowledge of any particular lived experience of any participant in cyberbullying victimization that could create bias prior to the commencement of the study. Throughout the course of study, bias and extraneous variables may act as distracters. I reflected upon potential extraneous distracters and recognized any potential bias in my reflexivity log as they appeared in the data collection process. By recognizing the focus on the constant potential for distracters and reflecting upon the focus of the study, I made a point to remind myself to remain objective to the unique lived experience of each individual. My reflexivity log is included in Appendix F.

Unlike quantitative research, the immersion of the researcher in the lived experience of the participant creates a situation unique to phenomenological research. While the phenomenological researcher cannot remain distantly disconnected as quantitative researchers, I utilized van Manen's (1990) advice of using personal reflection in order to remain objective. Through the reflection in the objectivity log, I worked to remain true to the goal of describing and interpreting the unique lived experience of cyberbullying victims from the participant's perspective by consciously and continuously reflecting on potential bias.

**Interview.** Participant involvement began with each participant answering questions in an interview where I, as the researcher, served a key role in the interview process. I conducted all interviews by a combination of the standardized open-ended approach and the interview guide, a method suggested by Patton (2002) in order to “offer the interviewer flexibility in probing and determine when it is appropriate to explore certain subjects in greater depth” (p.347). The combined method allowed me to prompt participants to delve deeper in areas of relevance in exploring the origination and manifestation of the cyberbully/cyberbullying victim relationship.

I conducted all interviews in Second Life during an evening convenient for the participant. Second Life is a free virtual reality site that allows users to participate in virtual meetings and discussions, providing a safe haven for participants to meet without exposing their identities. While other aspects of the study focus on maintaining disinhibition, the primary purpose of conducting the interviews online was to protect the identity of the participant from the possibility of being identified by other participants. Audio functions within Second Life allowed audio taping of interviews without requiring a face-to-face interview. That lowered the possibility of identity exposure of participants to those knowledgeable with my study in a town small enough for anyone to be recognized and assumptions to be made. Interviews with individuals lasted approximately sixty minutes, allowing time for elaboration through the use of prompts.

I audio taped all interviews and transcribed all data after interviews were completed. Audiotapes were deleted and transcribed data were held in a locked fireproof safe at my home. At the conclusion of the interview session, participants were asked to keep a journal through a Twitter microblog of any additional thoughts or feelings that may occur before and for the remainder of the data collection period.

**Individual Interview Questions.** In order to gather data to answer the research questions, individual interview questions were generated based on prior research and the research questions in consideration. Content validity and connections to prior research is included in Appendix B. Prior to reading the research question, the following definition was read to students based on the Aftab's (2008) definition of cyberbullying as "when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones." The individual interview questions posed to participants are listed below.

1. Describe your definition of cyberbullying.
2. What grade(s) were you in when you were cyberbullied?
3. Did you know the bully(s) beforehand?
  - a. Did you know him/her offline? If yes, please elaborate.
  - b. Did you know them online? If yes, please elaborate.
  - c. Where did you get to know them first?
  - d. How long did you know them?
  - e. Did you consider the cyberbully to be a friend of yours?
4. What caused your cyberbullying victimization to start?
  - a. Were there offline causes? If yes, please elaborate.
  - b. Were there online causes? If yes, please elaborate.
5. How many times were you cyberbullied?
  - a. Over what period of time?
6. Please explain how each method was used to cyberbully you online as I give you a prompt. If a method was not used to cyberbully you, just tell me.

- a. Cell Phone
  - b. Social Network
  - c. Instant Messaging
  - d. Chat Room
  - e. Email
  - f. Video Sharing
  - g. Was any other method used that I did not mention? Please explain.
7. Did the cyberbullying lead to issues offline?
- a. Did it lead to an argument or physical confrontation of any sort? Please explain.
  - b. Did you feel ostracized?
  - c. Did you feel isolated?
  - d. Did you have trouble getting along with others during your victimization?
8. Explain how the victimization made you feel.
- a. Were you depressed?
  - b. Were you angry?
  - c. Were you frustrated?
9. Do you believe that people act differently online than they do offline? If yes, continue to prompts.
- a. Do you think that having a hidden identity impacts their behavior online?
  - b. Do you think that people say mean things online that they would not say offline?
  - c. Do the morals of people change when they are online?
10. Were you bullied in your in school years in ways other than cyberbullying? If yes, prompt.



- a. Was there a connection between the bullying and your cyberbullying victimization?
11. How would you say that cyberbullying compares to traditional bullying?
12. Explain how you coped with the emotions related to cyberbullying.
- a. Who did you turn to?
    - i. Why did you choose to turn to them?
  - b. Did you find any activities or pastimes that helped?
  - c. What else seemed to help?
13. Please explain how your experience with cyberbullying victimization impacted your performance in school in each of the following areas.
- a. Distraction
  - b. Grades
  - c. State Mandated Tests
  - d. Attendance
  - e. Trouble resulting in discipline
14. Did you tell anyone about your victimization?
15. Please explain why you decided to tell or not to tell each of the following groups of individuals listed below (please input your answer beside the prompt).
- a. Friends
  - b. Parents
  - c. Teachers
  - d. School administrators
  - e. Counselors

- f. Law enforcement officers
  - g. Are there any other people that you told that did not fall into one of these groups?
16. What reaction did you receive from those you told about cyberbullying? Were you satisfied with their response?
17. Did telling people about the cyberbullying stop the cyberbullying?
- a. How did each individual or group that you told help or fail to help?
18. Was it worth the effort to tell people?
- a. Do you wish you had told more people?
  - b. Do you wish you had not told some people?
19. Did you respond to the bully online after you were cyberbullied?
- a. If yes, how?
  - b. If no, what was the result?
20. Did you respond to the bully offline after you were cyberbullied?
- a. If yes, how?
21. Did it result in any problems or feelings the next time that you met the cyberbully face to face?
- a. Please explain.
22. Do you believe that school leaders understand cyberbullying?
- a. Can they do anything about it?
  - b. Is it worth reporting?
23. Do you believe that school leaders can help solve the problem?
24. Do you believe that law enforcement officers can help solve the problem?
25. Why did you agree to be a participant in this study?

**Focus Groups.** Participants were then asked to join in a focus group study through Second Life. I held two focus group sessions on weekday evenings in hopes of maximizing participation by avoiding the most common working hours in our community and avoiding weekends altogether. Participants were asked to select an anonymous screen name for the focus group session to protect their identity from other participants. Selection of an anonymous screen name allowed for an open exchange of information by controlling their fear of being outed by others. Although participants were anonymous to other participants, I was informed of their identity beforehand so that their responses may be organized in connection with interview data for triangulation. In order protect the group, sessions were held in my private Skyland within Second Life that required special security orb access for entry into the Skyland for group participation.

Conducting the focus group portion through nontraditional online data processes allowed for participants to take on a more fearless role of information release through the retention of anonymity. The intention of utilizing Second Life was to retain the possibility of the disinhibition effect described by Mason (2008) as a phenomenon that allows for the open sharing of information online through the cover of anonymity. Second Life focus group sessions, like the Second Life interviews, were conducted by Patton's (2002) suggested combination of the standardized open-ended approach and the interview guide. Responses were transcribed and matched with participant interview data for triangulation. Both focus group sessions lasted approximately sixty minutes, allowing adequate time for thorough conversation and prompt-directed elaboration.

**Focus Group Questions.** In order to gather data to answer the research questions, focus group questions were generated based on prior research and the research questions in

consideration. The focus group questions were designed to foster further discussion in relation to major cyberbullying concepts that could potentially impact the research questions. Content validity and connections to prior research is included in Appendix B. The interview questions posed to participants are listed below.

1. What grade(s) were you in when you were cyberbullied?
2. How many of you knew the bully(s) beforehand?
3. Based on your personal experience, what types of events can cause cyberbullying victimization to start?
4. What methods were used to in your cyberbullying (ex. Texting, Facebook, Instant Messaging, ect.)
  - a. Which do you consider to be the most hurtful or harmful? Why?
5. Explain how the victimization made you feel.
6. Do you believe that people act differently online than they do offline?
  - a. If yes, please elaborate.
7. How would you say that cyberbullying compares to traditional bullying?
8. Did you find any activities or pastimes that helped you cope with cyberbullying victimization?
  - a. What else seemed to help?
9. Who did you tell about your cyberbullying victimization?
  - a. Why did you choose to tell those people?
10. Were you satisfied with their response?
  - a. Why or why not?
11. Did telling people about the cyberbullying stop the cyberbullying?

12. Was it worth the effort to tell people?
  - a. Do you wish you had told more people?
  - b. Do you wish you had not told some people?
13. Did you respond to the bully online after you were cyberbullied?
  - a. If yes, how? Did it help to solve the problem?
14. Did you respond to the bully offline after you were cyberbullied?
  - a. If yes, how? Did it help to solve the problem?
15. Do you believe that school leaders understand cyberbullying?
  - a. Can they do anything about it?
  - b. Is it worth reporting?
16. Do you believe that law enforcement officers can help solve the problem?
17. Why do you think that cyberbullying studies such as this one are important enough to participate in?

**Journal.** Participants were asked to maintain a journal of their thoughts and feelings that arose during their cyberbullying victimization on a blog. Participants were asked to create an anonymous account on Twitter and follow me on my Twitter blog. The blog was created as a forum for discussion rather than my personal thoughts. My only involvement in the Twitter blog was to ask participants in a prompt to submit a Tweet of any thoughts, feelings, or relevant information that arose to my blog after the focus group interviews were complete. Access to my blog was restricted to only study participants and access to Tweets was only available to followers of my blog. Twitter is a free microblogging site that allows for members to be followed by those who wish to know their thoughts or feelings at any moment. In a true reflection of cyberspace, the time and extent of the tweets depended entirely on the participant

and their desire to spread their feelings and information. The journal aspect took on a role similar to social networks online by allowing for other participants to respond at will with their thoughts to the journal entries of other anonymous participants.

I followed the participant responses on Twitter using my personal computer and Blackberry smartphone. When a Tweet was sent, I took note of it and connected it with interview and focus group data for triangulation. Twitter responses were organized by participant and are included in Appendix E. Twitter works from anonymous pseudonyms and the identity of the participants was not known by anyone other than the researcher. Participants had different pseudonyms for different phases of the study as they wished. Participants were asked to create all site names at the beginning of the study and were required to inform me of their pseudonyms. I was the only person aware of pseudonyms and I only chose to be aware of all pseudonyms beforehand in order to allow access to Second Life and Twitter sites and for connecting data for triangulation purposes.

**Triangulation.** Personal interviews and Second Life focus group sessions were held until I reached data saturation. Data saturation occurs when additional data collected becomes redundant and signifies the point at which the qualitative researcher can cease to collect data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Participants were asked to perform member checks on the transcribed data to ensure that the information transcribed was taken as it was intended to be taken without any possibility of miscommunication or misinterpretation of phrases of transcribed data. Participants all reviewed their data, clarified questions and potential misconceptions, and signed a document verifying that their transcribed information was accurate.

Triangulation strengthens a study by combining multiple data sources to provide multiple perspectives into a subject (Patton, 2002). Triangulation was achieved through the use of

interviews, focus groups, and journal information. Using multiple methods in data collection allowed for a more complete understanding of the perspective of participants than any single source of information could have provided.

### **Data Analysis**

After data collection, I transcribed all recorded data into a printable format in order to improve analysis. I became familiar with the material through reading of Second Life interview transcripts, Second Life focus group transcripts, and Twitter micro blog data. As I underwent the process of familiarization, I wrote reflective notes and compiled possible code ideas that emerged during the familiarization process. Codes emerged from analyzed data and transcripts rather than reviewed literature due to the lack of research in the area. Data was analyzed using the hermeneutic approach of van Manen (1990) in order to bridge the gap of understanding between generations separated by perceptions of the role of technology in daily life (Prensky, 2001a). I sought to act as a bridge across the digital divide because of my position between the generations, providing the link necessary using van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic approach to phenomenological research.

Data was organized according to the pseudonym assigned by the participant. Although the assigned name varied with Second Life and Twitter due to taken screen names, I knew the identity of each participant throughout the process on each site. All data was organized into a file that contains all of the responses of an individual participant. Focus group data was maintained and analyzed according to the flow of the conversation and the thematic discussions that arose during the conversation, but the information was used in correlation with the individual making each statement.

Data were sorted through the use of open coding. I sorted through all of the data after noting several major codes that I found during the familiarization process. Codes began to arise from the initial and secondary reading of data, and several readings were conducted to start formal coding in a cohesive manner (Patton, 2002). Categorical data were analyzed through van Manen's (1990) selective (highlighting) approach using key phrases and partial sentences to shine light on categorical highlights that may be used in the identification of themes. Using the categories that emerged from data, I coded highlighted information while using the constant comparative method while sorting. New categories that developed during the coding process were coded and organized as well. While sorting, data were also searched for tiers within the codes. The comparison of categories and groups to each other yielded themes that were organized through highlighted data.

Coded data were organized into themes. Following van Manen's (1990) approach of themes as navigational beacons that arrange and guide an exploration of the lived experience, thematic organization was used to guide the exploration of the lived experience of cyberbullying victimization in their perception of their unique reality. After themes were coded, the interpretation phase began on the codes and tiers. Following the initial open coding, I made connections that crossed over categorical lines to form themes based on the information previously organized into categories.

As an example, phrases concerning online reality were highlighted throughout the data through reading and formed a significant category. The categorical phrases on reality were connected with highlighted information from participants about the failure of adults to understand online processes, which was often termed as not being real to them. Using van Manen's (1990) approach as themes as navigational beacons, I was able to make a connection to



a blurred holistic reality of online/offline existence that exists in the mind of the participants but, in their lived experience, does not exist in the minds of digital natives.

The process of the selective or highlighting approach of van Manen (1990) provided for a deeper understanding of themes that connected the many facets of victimization through the connection of codes that crossed categorical lines established during open coding (Ary et al., 2006). Member checks were utilized at the conclusion of the coding period to ensure that the data were taken as intended, ensuring that the general thematic meanings derived from the analysis of data are accurate and trustworthy.

Analyzed data were organized to communicate to educational leaders through a written form that follows van Manen's (1990) suggested hermeneutic writing styles to communicate data into text form thematically, exemplificatively, and existentially. Primarily using a thematic approach, the study used emerging themes to create a systematic investigation of cyberbullying victimization and the manifestation of the cyberbully/cyberbullying victim relationship. Exemplificative writing was utilized to systematically address the various modalities that exist in the manifested relationship between cyberbullies and cyberbullying victims. Existential writing was used to address the core differences in temporality, spatiality, corporality, and sociality presented by the special perception of cyberspace as a differing level of reality by digital natives as indicated by Prensky (2001a). According to van Manen (1990), a combination of approaches may be used in order to effectively communicate analyzed hermeneutic data, especially if the nature of the phenomenon requires multiple angles of investigation not covered by the specific focus of an individual approach.

**Trustworthiness**

Credibility is a crucial component of qualitative studies that insures that the truthfulness of the study will be accepted in the field of educational research (Ary et al., 2006). Credibility was enhanced throughout the study through the use of data triangulation. Through the use of structural corroboration, the comparisons of data from multiple sources were utilized to enhance the credibility of the study. The sensitive nature of the study and the unique format of the online attacks limited the possibility of traditionally extensive observations. Data was triangulated through Second Life interview transcripts, Twitter micro blog writings, and member checks on transcripts on participants.

In addition to structural corroboration, I chose to enhance the referential adequacy through both member checks and low-inference descriptors. After data was transcribed, participants were asked to provide member checks by reviewing and elaborating on the accuracy of interview and Second Life transcripts. Member checks of data help to ensure validity by minimizing the risk of miscommunication (Ary et al., 2006). Due to time constraints with participants, member checks were focused upon their particular information and meaning rather than the analysis of the group as a whole. Any further insight provided by the participant was noted. I used the new data in the search for meaning beginning with the familiarization phase. In addition, I used low-inference descriptors through direct quotations from the Second Life interview and Second Life focus group transcripts in order to convey to readers the feelings of the participants and their cyberbullying experience after member checking. The use of low-inference descriptors was selected to build an accurate concept of the participants' experience in the mind of the reader through the use of their own member checked phrases (Ary et al., 2002).

In order to recognize personal bias, I kept a reflexivity log (Appendix F) throughout the study. I wrote in the log consistently to establish transparency concerning researcher bias. The reflexivity log chronicled the biases and tendencies that appeared during the study through a reflective account of activity during work with data and participants. The reflexivity log provided a constant reminder to maintain objectivity and reminded me to avoid extraneous variables that work to distract from the focus of the study (van Manen, 1990). The reflexivity log chronicled any potential personal bias and extraneous distracters as they arose in the course of the study and refocused me to maintain a focus on objective description and interpretation, while recognizing and navigating the unique lived experience of participants.

### **Ethical Issues**

Researching a topic affiliated with a reportable offense presents various possible ethical dilemmas. Since the cyberbullying victims studied are victims of a crime, I was aware of the potential that I may come in contact with information concerning illegal activity. In order to minimize the possibility of an ethical dilemma, I concentrated on maintaining the focus of the study in the formation of interview questions. The focus of the study is to gain an understanding of the development of the relationship between the cyberbully and the victim, but not the specific details of victimization. The direction of the questions steered participants in the direction of the focus rather than toward any attempt to uncover details of a specific illicit act. Participants were informed that cyberbullying is a crime and that any specific information that they wish to share should be taken to legal authorities, but no reportable information was revealed in the course of the study.

Concern was taken in connection with the emotions of cyberbullying victims. Although the focus of the study remained focused on past emotions, psychological bullying can cause

intense emotions that last many years (Olweus, 1993b). Participants were encouraged to reach out for professional psychological help if emotions were overwhelming prior to their participation in the study, as I am not professionally qualified to address serious emotional concerns that may have arisen in the course of the study. In addition, participants were provided with a list of free online resources designed to address the specific concerns of cyberbullying victims, as well as strategies to effectively deal with strong emotions.

All real and online identities, consent forms, digital recordings, and transcribed data will be kept in a locked, fireproof safe in the home of the primary researcher. I will be the only person to have access to the safe containing the confidential material. Data will be kept in the locked, fireproof safe for 3 years as required by Institutional Review Board regulations and will be destroyed after the required period has expired.

### **Summary**

Cyberbullying victimization has been established as a credible threat to student social, emotional, and academic health by quantitative research. The goal of this hermeneutic phenomenology was to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon from the voices of the victims. The voices of the victims were translated as I served to form a bridge between a generation of students that have never lived without information technology into a format that can be understood and utilized by a generation of educational leaders that are largely out of touch with the reality of cyberspace.

Data were collected through a series of interviews, journal writings, and focus group discussions held online. These data were analyzed using the selective or highlighting approach suggested by van Manen's (1990). The codes that developed were used to formulate a more complete picture of the origination and manifestation of cyberbullying victimization in the

participants' lives through van Manen's (1990) suggestion to use emergent themes as navigational beacons that form a guide to a more thorough understanding of cyberbullying victimization.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### Introduction

The goal of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to examine the origination and manifestation of cyberbullying victimization from the perspective of cyberbullying victims. In order to obtain a setting where open sharing would be encouraged, I chose to conduct individual interviews in Second Life, focus group interviews in Second Life, and journal writing through a Twitter microblog. The participants were 8 graduates of a small high school in southwest Georgia from the 2010-2011 school year. Pseudo names are used throughout this study in order to protect the identity of the site as well as the participants of this study.

### Participants

**Lita.** Lita is an 18 year old White female. She said that her grades in high school were “amazing.” Lita was an honor graduate and enjoyed her teachers more than anything else about high school because they inspired her to teach. Lita is majoring in education and intends to be an English teacher when she graduates. She said that her technology usage in high school primarily included computers, cell phones, social networks, email, chat rooms, instant messaging and video sharing. Lita said that she did trust her teachers and administrators during high school and that they “challenged her academically.” Lita said that she “never” got in trouble in high school that resulted in discipline.

Lita suffered two separate series of online attacks. Her first attack occurred in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and was followed in the 12<sup>th</sup> by a separate incident. While she knew the first of the attackers, she never discovered who was behind the second. In the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, she was first attacked by someone she hardly knew because of a broken relationship.

Lita's second victimization arose from an instance on her cell phone by someone who was in a recently broken relationship. The cyberbully accused Lita of trying to break up her relationship. While Lita spoke of not knowing her cyberbully, she added that cyberbullying methods made her wonder "if it was someone playing games to bully me that I did know."

Lita experienced strong emotions as she was dealing with cyberbullying victimization. Lita experienced a wide variety of emotional responses, including depression and confusion. Lita's reactions went far beyond depression and confusion as the victimization progressed. Lita found herself fighting with intense bouts of anger as well as depression. In Lita's experience, anger was only part of the issue. An underlying concern is the direction in which to place the anger. When the cyberbully is not someone who is known, frustration can move to the forefront of the emotional response.

Lita also believed that having a hidden identity is a key component to online victimization. She indicated that inhibitions may break down through hidden identities and screen names. Lita believed that people act very differently online than they do in person. She believed that people say things online that they would not say in person "all the time." As a result of her experience, she concluded that morality changes with hidden identities.

Lita chose different routes to address her victimization. When she was in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, she chose not to tell adults because she "didn't want to tattle" and "I wanted to go places I was scared that Mama wouldn't let me go if she knew that I may get into a fight." Lita said the fight never materialized because her cyberbully never confronted her in person. In the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, she did turn to her parents because the instance was "way scarier."

Even though her parents helped her through one of her victimizations, Lita believed that authority figures do not fully understand the complexity of cyberspace or the continuity between

online actions and the real world. Her thoughts on the digital disconnect involving educational leaders is indicative of her belief in a misunderstanding of cyberspace.

Lita said that her friends helped her cope in both instances because they supported her. Lita believed that her friends were vitally important in coping with victimization. In the second instance, she said that her father handled the problem and that it went away. The fear of more serious threats drove her to take a chance because of the severity of the threats drove her to look for help from adults. She said that telling her parents “did the trick” and stopped her second victimization.

Separate instances of cyberbullying led Lita to change her views on talking to adults as the severity increased. She believed that it will take a collective effort to end cyberbullying and that school leaders cannot do it alone. Lita also believed unity is not enough. Lita expressed a strong belief that school leaders need to adjust their policy and mindset to the changing times in order to improve prevention.

**Sandy.** Sandy is a 19 year old White female. Sandy said that she made “good” grades throughout high school and enjoyed her Advanced Placement courses more than anything else about high school because they “challenged her.” Sandy is majoring in medicine and said that her technology usage in high school primarily included computers, cell phones, email, chat rooms, social networking, and Skype. Sandy said that she did trust her teachers and administrators during high school, but believed that “some of them were evil.” Sandy “never” had any disciplinary issues in high school that resulted in discipline. Sandy had several cyberbullying occurrences in her 12<sup>th</sup> grade year. While she knew the majority of her cyberbullies, she was attacked by several people that she didn’t know. In most cases, she blamed intolerance for her victimization.



While Sandy did not experience depression, anger did occur in reaction to her victimization. Sandy believed that even though it is not physical, “it is just words, which does hurt either way.” In one instance, it led to offline violence as she “did get into a fight at a bar once over Anti-Semitic comments made to me online.” In a physical example that relayed the intensity of her emotion, Sandy expressed the frustration because “It is not like you can just go up to someone and shake it out of them while you’re online.”

From her experience, Sandy concluded that hidden identities are a major factor in cyberbullying victimization. Sandy expressed the belief that people change with a hidden identity because “they’re hiding behind a screen and it is different in real life. They can’t say those things to your face.” Sandy also believed that morals change when people go online, particularly in relation to the severity of things that are said online.

While Sandy believed that school leaders have some idea of cyberbullying, she believed that their knowledge is limited. Sandy understood that most school leaders did not grow up with cyberbullying in their lives and saw a major disconnect with the view of real-life and online processes. Sandy views school leaders as “immigrants too, so I don’t know if it is really all that real to them. Sticks and stones I guess.” She placed school leaders in the same category as her parents who she believed to be incapable of fully understanding her world as well.

Sandy expressed a strong belief that people her age are more in tune with technology and, therefore, are more capable of helping victims cope. She turned to friends to cope because she trusted their opinions. In a point that expressed a digital disconnect with authorities, she said that she would not tell police or authority figures.

Sandy developed a belief that even if authorities are capable of helping, they do not understand the problem well enough to do anything about it at this point. Sandy stated that

school leaders could not do anything about cyberbullying at this point and if they intend to, they have “got to understand it better and know what it is really like.” While Sandy seemed to believe that school leaders want to help students with their problems, she believed that law enforcement was not as concerned.

**Jack.** Jack is an 18 year old Native American male. Jack said that he made grades “lower than they could have been” in high school and enjoyed the “teachers who took their jobs seriously” more than anything else about high school. Jack is currently not in college, but intends to return and obtain a degree allowing him to become an automotive mechanic. Jack’s technology usage in high school primarily included computers, cell phones, email, social networking, and video sharing. Jack said that he trusted a few of his teachers and administrators during high school. Jack had several disciplinary incidents in high school, but added that most of them occurred in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades.

Jack has experienced cyberbullying “3 good times, but a lot of little things as well” during his 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade years. Jack’s victimizations included both online and offline causes with several people. He was cyberbullied by some people that he did not know and one that he considered to be a friend before but “I do not consider them a friend at all now.” Jack believed that there were offline causes that he doesn’t fully understand.

Jack also expressed a belief that there were online causes relating to intolerance. Jack practices traditional Native American rituals and holds many beliefs to be important, making him different than the majority of people. He felt that it is particularly true in relating to religious matters.

Jack experienced strong emotions in relation to his victimization. During his victimization, Jack felt isolated “a couple of times”. His isolation was primarily the result of

attempting to defend himself on the Facebook posts of other people. Jack also experienced anger during his victimization. The public nature of Facebook postings and the refusal of others to acknowledge his worth were at the heart of his anger. Jack expressed the belief that his anger also included frustration. When he could not seem to get his point across, he became frustrated with a belief that there was no way to win the argument with his cyberbully.

Jack felt that hidden identities play a major role in cyberbullying. He believed that hidden identities provide the cyberbully with the perception of being untouchable. Jack believed that it is “easier to be brave online” as a result. Jack believed that people say mean things online that they would never say in person. He believed that they feel protected and cannot be hit “through a computer screen.” Jack also believed that people are inclined to change their morals online, especially in connection with hidden identities and screen names.

Jack did not believe that school leaders understand cyberbullying. He believed that while they are capable of handling “real-life problems,” school leaders are “incompetent” when it comes to cyberbullying. His viewpoint stems from a belief that adults are rarely active participants in online social activities and view it as separate from the online world.

Jack believed that cyberbullying is not worth reporting to school leaders because school leaders “don’t understand and they can’t do anything anyway off campus.” His opinion of the capabilities of law enforcement is far worse. Jack deemed talking to the police as “not even worth talking about.”

In order to cope with his victimization, Jack turned to his parents and his friends. Ultimately, trust was the deciding factor in whether or not to tell people for him. Jack told his parents because they are “good at giving advice and I trust them”. He felt as though his friends were his best outlet because they were a good vent for his frustration. Jack did not believe that

school leaders are capable of doing anything to stop cyberbullying at this point. He believed that their power ends with the school campus and that anything off campus is really out of their jurisdiction.

**Evan.** Evan is an 18 year old White male. Evan said that he had good grades in high school and enjoyed his drama classes more than anything else about high school. Evan is majoring in drama in order to become an actor. His technology usage in high school primarily included computers, cell phones, email, social networking, and video sharing. Evan said that he trusted his teachers and administrators during high school and liked “most of them.” Evan “never” had any disciplinary issues in high school.

Evan has dealt with cyberbullying on “3 that I can think of. Yeah, 3” separate instances. Each of his instances lasted “a few days, but things stay out there longer than that.” Evan categorized his cyberbully as “an acquaintance” that he knew from school. Evan said that his victimization was in relation to status updates and picture postings to his site on Facebook, but emphasized that it was “wasn’t about” his cyberbully “in any way.” He believed that his victimization stems from “the way I carry myself” and general intolerance of being different.

Evan had strong emotional reactions to online victimization. He felt isolated because of commonalities in friend groups. Evan also said that he felt ostracized whenever the cyberbully was present. As a result, Evan felt frustrated because of the situation. For the most part, his frustration stemmed from a belief that he was innocent and had been attacked for no reason whatsoever.

Evan believed that hidden identities are a major factor in online victimization. Evan believed that the freedom granted by a hidden identity is “irresistible” because victims “can’t do much physically.” He expressed a strong belief that cyberbullies can easily hide behind false

identities and pseudo names when attacking their victims. Evan believed that cyberbullies hiding behind false identities have no qualms about saying mean things that they would not normally say in a real-life scenario. Evan believed that morality is influenced in much the same way as saying mean things. He believed that by using a cloak of invisibility provided by hidden identities, people can act as completely different people online.

Evan believed that school leaders cannot understand cyberbullying because of a different view of reality. His experience led him to believe that cyberbullying “doesn’t seem real” to authorities. He believed that school leaders would never believe how different people can be when they go online because school leaders are more concerned with the real-life relationships.

Evan turned to friends for help in his situation. Although he only told his best friend intentionally, he told others that asked or saw his victimization online and asked about it. Although most friends helped him out, Evan raised a point about the importance of only telling people who were trustworthy, as well as telling the wrong people could make the situation worse.

Evan expressed mixed viewpoints on whether or not school leaders can do anything to prevent cyberbullying. In general, Evan did not believe that much could be done at the present time. While he did not believe that much could be done in his particular scenario, he believed that there are situations where school authorities can help stop cyberbullying. Even so, he maintained a cautious statement on prevention.

Evan took an even more somber tone when law enforcement is involved. He believed that unless it is a crime or a major threat, law enforcement will not step in to help. He stated a previous situation at work as his rationale for the belief.

**Dan.** Dan is an 18 year old White male. Dan said that his grades were “average at best” and that he was “behind most of the time.” Dan enjoyed being around his “friends and his senior year” more than anything else about high school. Dan is currently an active duty United States Marine. Dan’s technology usage in high school primarily included computers, cell phones, social networking, and video sharing. Dan said that he liked “some” of his teachers but only really trusted “about 3” of his teachers and administrators in high school. Dan had several disciplinary incidents in high school, but added that most of them were “in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades.”

Dan experienced cyberbullying “A lot. 50 or 60 different times maybe.” Dan had the most instances of cyberbullying of all the participants and said that his victimization was spread across the entirety of his high school experience. While Dan said that “lots of things” caused his victimization to start, he believed that some seemingly small things like “beating a girl at Risk on Pogo” were often at the root of his problems. Although he cited many factors, Dan indicated a belief that failed relationships created the bulk of his trouble.

Dan experienced a variety of strong emotions relating to his victimization. Dan indicated that he was ostracized by friends of his ex-girlfriends, because of problems in common friend groups following breakups. Although he wanted to fight at times, he did not really desire to start things in person. For the most part, Dan just wanted to find a place to get away. He also felt isolated at times, but indicated much of the isolation was by choices he made in an attempt to escape victimization.

Dan’s experience led him to believe that people behave very differently online. He believed that the difference in behavior rises from a belief that “online, they feel like you can’t get to them or even find out who they really are,” and that “you can be whoever you wanna be behind a computer screen.” Dan believed that morals change significantly as they can get away

with things online, that they can't in person. He believed that the change in behavior can be explained by hidden identities.

Dan believed that school leaders do not fully understand cyberbullying. He believed that the absence of technology in their formative years resulted in a lack of understanding of online behaviors. As a result, he did not believe that school leaders are capable of handling the problem.

Dan tried to cope with victimization by occupying his mind with other thoughts and actions. He found that video games, shooting, and drinking alcohol helped, but he did not tell anyone until his final years of high school. Instead of talking, Dan internalized his emotions. At times, it seemed too much for him to handle. He admitted lashing out his frustration when he decided to punch holes in his walls. He also chose to fight back online as a coping mechanism.

Dan said that somewhere around his junior year, he "got close to one friend and started telling him." While he trusted his friend to help him cope, he was also forced to talk to the school principal after getting in a disciplinary problem. Dan was required to speak with the counselor after getting in trouble, but it turned out to be a talk that he really never wanted to happen.

Dan believed that school leaders do not fully understand cyberbullying. He believed that the absence of technology in their formative years resulted in a lack of understanding of online behaviors. As a result, he did not believe that school leaders are capable of handling the problem. His trouble with cyberbullying and the ensuing encounter with school authorities led him to believe that school leaders would not do anything about the problem. Dan believed that unless it happens at school they really can't do anything. Dan's experience led him to believe that cyberbullying is not even worth reporting to school leaders because of the lack of understanding.

While Dan believed that school authorities cannot really solve the problem and do not focus enough on cyberbullying, his opinion of law enforcement was even lower. He said he

never told law enforcement because he “don’t want to be that guy” and “it makes you look bad when you get them into anything.” Another reason that Dan never told police is rooted in the belief that law enforcement officers do not have the capability of understanding and addressing online behaviors.

**Carly.** Carly is a 19 year old White female. Carly said that her grades in high school were “great.” Carly was an honor graduate that enjoyed her friends more than anything else about high school. She is majoring in Speech-Language Pathology major and intends to work with children with communication disorders. Carly said that her technology usage in high school primarily included computers, cell phones, social networks, chat rooms, instant messaging. She said that she did trust her teachers and administrators during high school and that some were much like parents to her. Carly said that she never got in any trouble in high school that resulted in discipline.

Carly was cyberbullied two times during her senior year. While she terms one instance as “not so bad”, Carly’s more severe cyberbullying victimization “went on for months.” She believed that the less severe instance started because of defriending someone on Facebook. The more severe instance was a result of her cyberbully going through a difficult time in her life and that the bully was jealous of her successful relationship. Carly’s victimization was amplified because of her involvement in social networking, especially in the second case.

Carly experienced strong emotions during her more severe instance of victimization. Carly felt afraid for her safety as she thought the threats were realistic and could be carried out in real life. She was angry during the victimization and wanted to “break her face” in reaction. In an attempt to try to end the problem, Carly “gave her my address and begged her to come over,” but



her cyberbully chose not to come over. As a result, the cyberbullying continued and her frustration continued to mount.

Carly found it difficult to escape from cyberbullying. Her desire to remain connected through her smartphone made victimization especially problematic as it was difficult to find a safe haven. She believed that cyberbullying is worse than traditional bullying, especially because of a fear that things can always get worse in a public forum.

Carly felt that people “definitely” act differently online. She believed that if the attacks were carried out in person, “something would be done about it.” Carly believed that it was harder to react because “she knew that I cared about school, my future, and my reputation,” so she did not go after the bully for fear of jeopardizing her future. Additionally, she believed that safety of a hidden identity makes it possible to carry out vicious attacks on people.

In order to cope with victimization, Carly turned primarily to her friends and family. Her mother came to her to discuss the problem and to see if there was anything that she could do. She said it was great opportunity to talk about her problems, but there were unexpected problems that arose when her friends tried to defend her to the bully.

Carly reported her victimization to law enforcement authorities when the threats occurred. She found that unless a specific threat is placed upon a specific person by name, there is little that law enforcement can do to solve the problem. Her experience has led Carly to believe that school leaders cannot do anything about cyberbullying unless it happens on campus and it is between two students. Since her case was “off campus,” she did not believe there was anything that school leaders could do to help her. Ultimately, she believed that the major problem preventing educational leaders from addressing cyberbullying is a lack of understanding.

**Haley.** Haley is a 19 year old African-American female. Haley said that her grades in high school were “so-so, but I graduated.” Haley enjoyed her friends more than anything else about high school. Haley is currently enrolled in a technical college with the goal of becoming a dental hygienist. Haley said that her technology usage in high school primarily included computers, cell phones, and social networks. Haley said that she did trust her teachers and administrators during high school and that they “definitely cared” about her success. Haley said that she never got in trouble in high school that resulted in discipline.

Haley was victimized “maybe 20 or so” times. While the attacks were spread throughout her time in high school, her attacks occurred “primarily in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grades.” Haley said that she knew almost all of her attackers and that most were friends, or people she knew through friends, or ex-boyfriends. Haley believed that most of her victimization was caused by broken relationships and misunderstandings.

Haley was primarily attacked on social networks. She believed that people chose to attack her on Facebook because of the popularity and visibility of the site. Her cyberbullies also attacked her through video sharing, but she could not bring herself to watch the video that she heard about.

Haley experienced strong and long-lasting emotions as a result of her victimization. She became angry about things that were said about her and her friends and that things said to her permanently fractured some relationships. She also experienced emotional trauma and isolation coupled with a desire to escape the “online stuff that just won’t go away.”

Haley believed that people behave differently online than they do in person. She believed that people try to reinvent themselves and often say things they shouldn’t or wouldn’t say in real life scenarios. Haley believed that people are often “scared to say it to your face” and that a

belief in online invincibility leads them to say things that they never would in a traditional setting. She blamed the difference in behavior online on hidden identities.

Haley turned to her friends for support during her victimization. She chose to confide in her friends because she trusted them and needed support. She said that while her friends helped her overcome her victimization, she did take up for herself as well.

Haley believed that there are some scenarios where school leaders may be able to help. She believed that “maybe” there a possibility that school leaders can help with cyberbullying “if it is bad and at school or something.” However, she believed that school administrators are unable to do anything if it happens away from school. According to Haley, the largest obstacle that school leaders encounter is a lack of understanding. Haley believed that law enforcement has many of the same problems as school leaders in relating to cyberbullying. Much like school administrators, the digital disconnect was prevalent with misunderstandings and general apathy toward the reality of a different generation.

**Walt.** Walt is an 18 year old White male. Walt said that his grades were “not that good, but I graduated.” Walt enjoyed being around all of the girls and his senior year more than anything else about high school. After the conclusion of this study, Walt became an active duty United States Marine. Walt’s technology usage in high school primarily included computers, cell phones, social networking, and video sharing. Walt said that he trusted some of his teachers and administrators but “only the couple or few that really cared about his success.” Walt had several disciplinary incidents in high school, but that that most of them occurred “in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades without a doubt.”

Walt has no idea how many times he was cyberbullied, but said that it was “a lot.” Walt said that his victimization was started in middle school and that he can’t remember a year when

something didn't happen. Walt cited online causes such as Facebook postings and status changes as common online factors. Offline, Walt cited broken relationships as the major factor.

Walt experienced intense emotions as a result of his victimization. Ostracism was a major emotion, especially within common friend groups with the cyberbully. Walt experienced a desire to escape from his victimization. He said that he was depressed and wanted to be alone at times. Walt said that while isolation was a major factor, most of the isolation was his decision. Ultimately, he wished to find an escape from the problem. Walt also dealt with anger and frustration. Walt's anger led him to punch walls at times in order to quell the desire to inflict physical harm on his cyberbully. Walt also believed that his frustration was a major factor.

Walt looked for distractions to cope with victimization. He didn't talk to friends about his problems unless they asked him about it because he considered it to be a personal matter. He also avoided talking to his parents and teachers out of fear that they would "make it worse." Walt did find comfort in distractions that kept his and body mind occupied and provided a sense of relief.

Walt believed that people commonly say mean things online that they would never say in person. He believed that cyberbullies feel secure from a distance and say things they would not say in a traditional environment. Walt believed that the behaviors are different because they are scared of potential violence in person and are "really scared and cowards to tell the truth." Walt believed that hidden identities are largely responsible for changes in behavior and morality online.

Walt believed that there is little that authorities can do to solve the problem of cyberbullying. He believed that the major problem school leaders would encounter in addressing cyberbullying is that they don't understand what it feels like because the technology was not present in their lives. Walt had to discuss his problem with his principal after getting in trouble,

but deemed it to be a “waste of time.” Walt said that he wouldn’t have told the principal if he were not in trouble because he didn’t trust them and that they “couldn’t help and wouldn’t have done anything.”

Walt also chose to avoid telling law enforcement officers. He distrusts police and did not want to tell them out of fear of exacerbating the situation. He also felt that there was little that law enforcement officers could do to solve the problem.

### **Themes**

Data analysis produced 4 themes common to the lived experience of cyberbullying victims participating in this study. Data indicates that cyberbullying arises from damaged relationships. In reaction to damaged relationships, cyberbullies seek exact revenge in online public areas frequented by many people, causing strong emotional reactions in cyberbullying victims. The attacks are generated online, leading to a blurred holistic reality. Data indicates that digital natives view online activity as a very real part of their lives. On the other hand, adults tend to view online and offline realities as separate entities with the physical realm compromising true reality. When seeking assistance in dealing with victimization, cyberbullying victims look to friends rather than adults and authority figures due to a lack of understanding of their holistic reality.

**Cyberbullying arises from damaged relationships.** Participants continually referred to various relationship problems that lie at the heart of the origination of cyberbullying victimization. For 6 of the participants, romantic relationships that became broken and the ensuing jealousy were cited as being direct causes for their victimization. Walt, Dan, Haley, Evan, and Carly specifically cited broken romantic relationships as a specific cause of their victimization while Lita and Carly cited a broken relationship in the life of someone else as their

cause of victimization. Haley, Walt, Dan, Lita, Carly, and Evan cited jealousy over a relationship as a cause of their victimization.

“Mostly dating. Cheating will really do it. Oh, and dating the sister of an ex will really do it. They really want to get you back, but I guess I deserve some of it for that.” -Dan

“It mostly had to do with relationships. I did some things to make some girls mad and they were the main problem.” -Walt

“I’d say that cheating on girls and dating their friends was the biggest problem.

Sometimes it would be between them and I would get dragged into it.” -Walt

Arguments arising from broken friendships were also indicted as being a cause of cyberbullying origination. From their experiences, all participants determined that arguments among friend groups and acquaintances were a factor in cyberbullying victimization. The participants attributed the majority of problems among friend groups to the spread of rumors, where participants were again unanimous in believing that rumors circulating among friends and acquaintances caused cyberbullying victimization to begin.

“My friend knew her personally, they had a problem, so she cyberbullied me on MySpace too because I was friends with the girl she was mad at.” -Lita

“My exes got mad and posted things, her friends that were also my friends wouldn’t have anything to do with me for a while. I’d try to talk to them and they’d act like they didn’t want me to be there.” -Walt

“I have no idea why because I never talked to her, much less mess with her. She was spreading rumors and it was just gossip” -Jack

Sandy, Jack, Dan, and Evan determined that preconceived notions can cause broken relationships before they begin. Sandy, Jack, Dan, and Evan were adamant that intolerance can

cause relationships to fracture before they begin, causing the same general problems as broken relationships. Prejudices toward religious differences, sexual orientation, and general behavior were all cited as causes of cyberbullying orientation by Sandy, Jack, Dan, and Evan.

“I remember one that was saying Anti-Semitic things online. Intolerance is the biggest problem and one was a Neo-Nazi. Some were things about my friends who are gay. They knew it offline and took it online to say things about them and their lifestyle.” –Sandy

“Anti-Semitism on Facebook by someone who claimed to be a Neo-Nazi. I defended my boyfriend and got called a Jewish bitch. I am not even Jewish, but it still came back to me.” -Sandy

“Some are just intolerant of others and I am different and proud of it. One was because he did not respect my religious beliefs because I am not a Christian that believes every word of the Bible to be true. The others were just about rumors and gossip online.” -Jack

“It was basically intolerance that started it all with me. They were calling me names like gay and faggot just because of the way that I act every day. It was all rumors and people not liking people who are different than they are.” –Evan

The predominant viewpoint of the participants is that damaged relationships form the foundation of cyberbullying. From their lived experience, participants found that cyberbullying can form as a result of broken romantic relationships, broken friendships, or various prejudicial stances that fracture fledgling relationships before they fully form. The impending rumors and gossip are placed in a public forum online, resulting in a ripple effect that can further fracture existing relationships. The result is a cyberbullying victimization that becomes a constantly changing phenomenon and places evolving stress on cyberbullying victims.

**Strong emotional actions cause strong emotional reactions.** Participants unanimously believed that cyberbullying victimization was intended to expose victims to public embarrassment and humiliation. Haley, Sandy, Jack, Walt, Dan, Carly, and Evan cited Facebook as a highly public arena in which cyberbullying manifested itself in their lived experience. Haley, Sandy, Jack, Walt, Dan, Carly, and Evan were also unanimous in citing a connection to smartphones as being problematic in connection with Facebook victimization. Lita, the only participant not to mention Facebook as a problem, was attacked on MySpace prior to the explosion of popularity in Facebook. Ignoring the name of the specific site, social networking can be considered to be a unanimous problem among participants. Participants were also unanimous in reporting multiple incidences of victimization.

“I could not get on Facebook or my phone without getting messages from her and postings by her. I wanted to get away, but I didn’t want to miss any important calls or anything. I couldn’t get away because as long as I was around a computer or my phone it was always there. Even when I wasn’t around my phone, I knew that it was still going on and it really bothered me.” -Carly

“I have just had to turn my phone off before and leave it in another room and go to my room. I would have broken it. I knew it was still going, but at least I didn’t have to see it. Even if you are just waiting on a call, Facebook comes up with a message and you know what it is.” -Walt

“It even got to the point that she said my initials and said that I would wind up in the back of an ambulance and she would be in handcuffs. It was really bad and really scary and it was all so public. She used my initials, but everyone knew exactly who she was talking about.” -Carly



“Everyone can see it. It just gets put out there and it doesn’t go away. I’m not really that big and have been bullied. It goes away and only lasts a few minutes. When you leave school or go home, it goes away. Online, it just stays out there.” -Dan

“Some people took an embarrassing video of me and said they put it on YouTube. I never saw it. I didn’t want to. People asked me about it, so I guess they did or at least showed it to people. I still don’t know what happened to it and really don’t want to.” -Haley

Participants were unanimous in believing that people behave differently online than they do in person. Participants all reported a belief in disinhibition through a belief that cyberbullies say meaner things online than they would say in person. Participants were again unanimous in believing that hidden identities play a major role by providing a sense of safety or shield for protection while online. While most believed it to be a cowardly act, all professed that the notion was accurate in explaining behavior. Participants were also unanimous in believing that morality changes online, allowing for a more brutal environment for attacks than the physical realm. The brutal environmental factor was complicated by the inability to find a safe haven or escape attacks, a trend mentioned by Haley, Sandy, Jack, Walt, Dan, Carly, and Evan.

“Online violence starts from ppl feeling secure behind a computer screen/phone to speak their mind in a way they wouldn’t” -Walt

“People can be who they want to be. I have seen people on Facebook that don’t hardly talk in person and seem real shy say “F” this and “F” that on Facebook and really speak out in good and bad ways. You would never think they would be that way, but online it is like they are a different person.” -Evan

“They seem safe, so they say whatever they want because they feel like they can get away with it and nothing can be done. There is no way to prove it, so they can say

whatever they want and you don't even know who it is attacking you. I just wish they could look at me when they say it so that they could see the emotion and the hurt they cause. They would never say those things face to face." -Lita

"They lie. Some hide behind fake names and make fake pages. One claimed to be someone she wasn't. She even put fake pictures online and all. It is easy to be brave when nobody knows who you are, but they are cowards in person." -Dan

"It is their shield. It is like they can make their profile their mask and they feel like it protects them to do or say whatever. They feel like since nobody knows who they are that they could say pretty much anything because nobody will correct them." -Jack

"Everyone can see it. It just gets put out there and it doesn't go away. I'm not really that big and have been bullied. It goes away and only lasts a few minutes. When you leave school or go home, it goes away. Online, it just stays out there." -Dan

All participants admitted to having a strong emotional response to the public nature of their cyberbullying victimization. Frustration was the most common response shared with all participants experiencing high levels of frustration at various elements of their victimization. Haley, Sandy, Jack, Walt, Dan, Carly, and Lita reported anger toward the cyberbully. Haley, Sandy, Jack, Walt, Dan, Carly, and Evan reported feeling isolated, though Dan and Walt reported that it was by choice to attempt to escape. Ostracism was reported by Walt, Dan, and Evan. Depression was reported by Walt, Dan, and Lita. Walt and Dan reported having problems getting along with others during their victimization.

"There were a few times when I locked myself in my room. It was my choice. I left the phone in the other room and just wanted to get away even though I knew it was still going on. It's hard to get away from it." -Dan

“Most of it was on me. It was my way of dealing with it. I would go in my room and lock the doors. I sometimes hit and kicked the walls. I am going to have to use some of my money from the Marines to fix some of it” -Walt

“I felt alone and mad. Things were being said about me that I couldn’t do anything about. The things that were being said about me were ignorant and mean. I tried to set it right, but it was clear that they just wanted to get to me and not to listen to me. I was very mad. It really makes you feel alone when you are fighting to get a word in with people who you don’t like you on their page. Like I said before, it is like trying to fight a fight on someone else’s land when they have all of their people and you have none of yours. You are going to lose and there is nothing you can do about it. It just wants to make you put your fist through a wall since you can’t hit them.” -Jack

Haley, Sandy, Jack, Walt, Dan, Lita, and Carly tried fighting back online as a response to their victimization. Haley, Jack, Sandy, Lita, and Evan said that the best response is to simply ignore the cyberbullying. Haley, Sandy, Jack, Walt, and Dan reported having offline arguments, although only Sandy experienced physical violence. Haley, Sandy, Lita, Carly, and Evan said that they chose to try to avoid their cyberbully. Participants were unanimous in feeling anger and anxiety when they next saw their cyberbully, especially since the identity was often in question.

“I wondered if it was someone I knew that was trying to mess with me pretending to be somebody else. That could have been it and I still get frustrated thinking about it. I mean, I just couldn’t figure out who to be mad at because I couldn’t put a face with it.” -Lita

“I was afraid because I have skeletons in my closet like everyone else and as much damage as they do, you always just want it to end before they can do any more. I was really scared because I was really afraid that she would put more out on me.” -Carly

“Some of my friends were his friends. I was really uncomfortable around my friends when they were around him.” -Evan

“I was ready to fight if she said something the first time because I knew who she was. I thought we would, but she never came at me like that. The second time, I was angry, but I had no idea who was behind it.” -Lita

“I didn’t do anything to them at all. I was really uncomfortable anytime that I was around them or anytime that they were in my sight. I just wanted to pretend that they weren’t there, but I couldn’t ignore them.” -Evan

“It was just annoying because you feel like you are helpless and there is nothing you can do or anyone you can turn to to make it stop.” -Evan

“It just feels like there is absolutely nothing you can do about it until they get tired of messing with you or they find someone else to move on to.” – Carly

Participants believe that cyberbullying is intentionally placed on a public forum in order to embarrass and humiliate victims. Popularity is a contributing factor as most cyberbullying occurs in a popular forum such as Facebook in order to humiliate the victim at a highly visible level. The result is an inescapable brutality that is ever-present due to advances in mobile technology. The brutality of cyberbullying was enhanced by a lack of inhibitions online and a moral disconnect that was present in the lived experience of participants. The intensity of the attacks resulted in an amalgamation of strong emotional reactions including embarrassment, isolation, anger, and frustration. While the majority fought back in reaction to victimization, their experience left the impression that the best option was to ignore the cyberbully until they felt bored with the instance. From their experience, fighting back only prolonged and intensified victimization and provided no path to a solution.

**Blurred line of online-offline contextual reality.** Participants indicated that a generational divide exists that transcends linguistic differences and technological fluency. In their minds, adults fail to comprehend the reality of cyberspace. Participants were unanimous in believing that school administrators and law enforcement officers did not fully understand cyberbullying.

“You can’t do anything but report it. In person, you can get it to the right people to get some help. Online, it just doesn’t seem real to the adults that can help.” -Evan

“I think that they really don’t think that some people can be so mean online. They know the student in person and think they know them, but they act like a different person online. I don’t think that they understand that or how real online things are in our lives.”

-Evan

“They would get a real bully...you know what I am talking about, but Facebook bullying doesn’t seem real to them.” -Dan

“I don’t think that they relate to the experience online because it is not where they live their lives. If you aren’t there enough to know about it, you can’t understand what it is like.” -Carly

“They don’t understand what it feels like because they have never been in the situation”

-Walt

“I think they want to and are realizing that it is a problem, but they don’t know what it is like. It is not real to them. Until you’re there, you just don’t know what it is like.” -Lita

“They don’t see it as a real place and they don’t understand how it carries over back and forth online and in real life. They think they do because they read the news, but they can’t

until they have been through it. Since they aren't participants, they are outsiders.

Outsiders can never fully understand until they really learn to listen to people who have been there without judging them." -Jack

"Even though by laws on physical details it isn't real, to our generation it is quite real."

-Jack

Participants were unanimous in believing that school administrators cannot do anything about the problem unless it occurs on school grounds, but the results go deeper. Participants were unanimous in believing that older generations who have limited experience with technology do not view cyberspace as a real place and are preoccupied with discipline and student health in the physical realm. With the ingrained belief that cyberspace is a separate reality, participants responded strongly and sometimes sarcastically when asked if school leaders or law enforcement officers could do anything to stop cyberbullying.

"Once it starts, there is nothing you can do to stop it like you can in person where it is visible and principals think it is a real problem." -Evan

"These cops around here can't even fix their bikes. Do you think they can understand online problems? No way." -Dan

"If it is something they can see, it is more real to them than something in cyberspace. It just seems distant to them and unimportant." -Evan

They probably think they have more real problems to deal with anyway than something online." -Haley

"They think that they have bigger problems, but it is because they don't really understand how big of a deal it is either." -Evan

“No. For them, it is like a faucet leaking into a yard. They can stand at the fence and soak it up with towels, but they cannot stop the leak. If it is at school, maybe they can control it there, but they can’t stop Facebook.” -Jack

“I went to them with a similar problem and they didn’t do anything to help. I didn’t trust them after that, especially something online that they wouldn’t think was a big deal.”

-Evan

“If they don’t understand, how can they (help)?” -Carly

Cyberbullying victims unanimously believe that a generational divide concerning reality exists between themselves and those who lived their childhood and youth without the presence of cyberspace. As a result, they believe that authority figures such as school administrators and law enforcement officers do not understand their version of reality. Participants believe that while authority figures can handle problems common in the physical realm, their failure to understand and conceptualize the reality of cyberspace in the lives of a different generation renders them incapable of addressing cyberbullying. Participants were often sarcastic in their responses, indicating that the focus placed on the physical realm by authority figures resulted in a heightened level of distrust and contempt for their capacity to solve the problems connected with the holistic reality of digital natives.

**Help arises only from those who understand generational reality.** Walt, Sandy, Jack, Dan, Carly, and Evan believe that telling others cannot help stop victimization while Lita and Haley believe that telling others can help. Walt, Sandy, Jack, Dan, Carly, and Evan conveyed a strong belief that telling authorities can make the problem worse and that the best path is to simply ignore the problem and learn to cope.

“I am not sure that they won’t make it worse sometimes by just talking and making the problem worse that it already was and not punishing the bully. Sometime school leaders talk too much when they should be willing to punish them for the harm they cause.” -Lita

“They really don’t like me and I don’t like or trust them. They couldn’t make it better and it would most likely be a disaster.” -Jack

“Police in this town? Really? If they don’t know you, they will take you to jail. They would cause more problems. Way more problems.” -Sandy

When coping with victimization, participants unanimously turned to their friends. The rationale behind their choice was unanimously trust and the belief that only their friends are capable of understanding what they are going through. Their decision ultimately rested upon trust and an understanding of reality. Although their friends helped, problems worsened at times as friends entered the fray.

“I talked to some of them. I talked to my good friends about it...the ones I can trust.”

-Evan

“I just wanted someone that could relate and understand me to talk to.” -Jack

“They relate to me and I can trust them. They will also be direct with me and tell me when I was wrong.” -Sandy

“I saw that as a chance to vent. Some actually took up for me. She turned and started to attack my friends that spoke up and started a bunch of rumors and drama about them as well.” -Carly

Although all of the participants feared telling some adults, individual participants did tell some people that they trust as they sought to cope. Lita, Jack, and Carly told their parents, although Carly was asked by her parents. Dan, Lita, and Carly told some teachers. Dan and Walt



told the principal, although neither instance was by choice. Dan and Evan told the school counselor, although only Evan did so willingly. Of all participants, only Carly reached out to law enforcement personnel.

“The principal made me talk to her once. I didn’t want to and I didn’t know or trust her like that. She tried to be comforting, but that didn’t solve anything. I basically said anything I had to to get out of there.” -Dan

“Unless they say your name or make a specific threat directly to you. If they don’t do that, they really can’t do anything. If it is not a serious threat, they probably wouldn’t understand how bad it is and think that they could be doing something more important” - Carly

While the majority of the participants believed that telling others cannot help to solve the problems, all of the participants told someone of their victimization. Rather than seeking a solution, the majority of the participants sought to vent and receive positive support to help cope with victimization. For this purpose, they predominately turned to their most trusted friends. Only a few victims told adults, with two doing so simply because they were forced to talk due to disciplinary problems at school. The primary reason for not talking to adults was a lack of trust and the perception that adults were inept in dealing with cyberspace and that they could potentially exacerbate the problem.

## **Summary**

**Research Question 1: What are the perspectives of individuals who are cyberbullying victims in regards to the origination of their victimization?** The lived experience of participants led them to believe that broken friendships often lead to cyberbullying victimization. Broken relationships were cited to have resulted from broken romantic

relationships, disturbances in friend groups, and cyber-related issues impacting friend groups. In the experience of several participants, budding relationships were prematurely broken by prejudicial stances concerning religious beliefs, sexuality, and personal appearance and conduct. In the wake of damaged relationships, rumors and gossip hit popular public cyber forums in an attempt to embarrass and humiliate cyberbullying victims.

**Research Question 2: In what context or contexts does the cyberbullying/cyberbullying victim relationship impact the lived experience of cyberbullying victims after the initial incidence of cyberbullying?** Participants believed that the resulting cyberbullying victimization was a strong emotional action resulting in strong emotional reactions in the lived experience of cyberbullying victims. A wide array of emotions followed, leaving cyberbullying victims in search of a means of coping with the brutality of the attacks in a blurred world where escape was impossible due to advances in mobile technology.

The participants unanimously expressed a blurred line of reality that differs from digital natives to digital immigrants. The viewpoint of digital immigrants of a clearly separated virtual world and physical world is vastly different from the holistic reality experienced by digital natives. As a result of the generational chasm, participants lost faith and trust with the ability of school administrators and law enforcement personnel to handle cyber-related issues.

**Research Question 3: What strategies do victims of cyberbullying report that they use to cope with cyber-victimization?** Instead of turning to adults and authority figures for help, participants feared that any role that adults played could exacerbate the problem. Rather than take that chance, participants unanimously turned to trusted friends who were capable of understanding the reality of the attacks in the lives of victims and providing a vent while fully understanding how to avoid worsening the problem. While the participants unanimously found

venting to friends helpful, some of the participants engaged in problem behaviors such as drinking to alleviate the pressure of victimization. Two participants chose to take out their aggression on inanimate objects, inflicting pain on themselves in order to cope with the pain rather than resort to physical violence on an online attacker that they could not address directly.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Introduction

The problem is that cyberbullying is a tremendous challenge to the physical and psychological health of students in schools worldwide (Kowalski et al., 2008; Mason, 2008; Shariff, 2008). Journalistic accounts of suicide and violence associated with cyberbullying victimization has brought national attention to the phenomenon, but has done little to enhance knowledge of the origination and manifestation of cyberbullying victimization in the lives of students. Compounding the problem is a significant digital divide between students that have lived their lives with ever-present technology and educational leaders who have immigrated into the digital medium (Prensky, 2001a; Trolley, Hanel, & Shields, 2006).

Cyberbullying research is currently in the infant stages of research and is currently riddled with gaps that need to be filled (Kowalski et al., 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Tokunaga, 2010). While quantitative research has investigated some aspects of cyberbullying, no in-depth qualitative studies have been conducted to provide insight into the behavior from the participants' perspective through their lived experience. Qualitative research was lacking across the entire genre of research. The qualitative gap relating to the origination and manifestation of cyberbullying behaviors was of particular concern in the development of this study due to the importance of understanding those aspects of cyberbullying for preventing future occurrences that threaten the well being of students.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study examined the origination and manifestation of cyberbullying victimization using the lived experiences of cyberbullying victims graduating in the 2010-2011 school year. In order to retain anonymity within a sensitive topic and the potential

of open sharing common to online behaviors in a group setting, the research phase of the study was carried out entirely online through Second Life and Twitter.

### **Review of the Methodology**

In order to obtain a setting where open sharing would be encouraged, I conducted individual interviews in Second Life, focus group interviews in Second Life, and journal writing through a Twitter microblog. The participants were 8 graduates of a small high school in southwest Georgia from the 2010-2011 school year. The participants selected for the study were 18-19 years of age.

Data were sorted through the use of open coding. I sorted through the data after noting several major codes that I found during the familiarization process. Categorical data was analyzed through van Manen's (1990) selective (highlighting) approach using key phrases and partial sentences to shine light on categorical highlights that may be used in the identification of themes. Using the categories that emerged from data, I coded highlighted information while using the constant comparative method.

Categorical data was organized into themes. Following van Manen's (1990) approach of themes as navigational beacons that arrange and guide an exploration of the lived experience, thematic organization was used to guide the exploration of the lived experience of cyberbullying victimization from the perspective of the participant gained through their shared experience of cyberbullying victimization. Following the initial coding, I looked to make connections that cross over categorical lines to form themes based on the information previously organized into categories. Member checks were utilized at the conclusion of the coding period to insure that the data were taken as intended and to help insure that the general thematic meanings derived from the analysis of data were accurate and trustworthy.

### Summary of the Themes

**Cyberbullying arises from damaged relationships.** Each of the participants was cyberbullied by someone that they knew personally or considered an acquaintance through friends. When friendships became fractured, many of the participants were bullied as a result of the broken relationship. For some of the participants, it was an ex-girlfriend or an ex-boyfriend. For others, it was a person that they considered a friend or an acquaintance that was connected by a common friend. When romantic or friendly relationships became strained, cyberbullying arose as former friends, acquaintances, or romantic interests sought revenge through cyberspace. In the majority of the cases, jealousy of remaining relationships within friend groups and rumors set in motion by broken relationships caused cyberbullying victimization to appear in the lived experience of participants.

In some cases, potential friendships were broken by intolerance. In these cases, cyberbullying began to appear before friendships fully developed because of preconceived notions of right and wrong in the mind of the participants' cyberbullies. Factors such as religious differences, sexual orientation, gender, and a general intolerance of the differences among human beings were all cited by participants as inciting cyberbullying victimization after their cyberbully learned or perceived the victim to be wrong in their beliefs or behavior. The perceptions of cyberbullies were incorrect at times, but victimization occurred nonetheless.

Kowalski et al. (2008) found that preexisting relationships often causes cyberbullying victimization. The findings of Kowalski were supported by this study as all of the participants had a preexisting relationship with at least one of their cyberbullies. In each case, something caused the preexisting relationship to fracture. A variety of factors such as rumors and breakups

were mentioned, but a preexisting relationship was a unanimous commonality among the participants of this study.

**Strong emotional actions cause strong emotional reactions.** Participants unanimously believed that cyberbullying victimization was intended to expose victims to public embarrassment and humiliation. Complicating matters was the lack of a safe haven to escape victimization, such as a home in traditional bullying. Equipped with smartphones and habitually connected to cyberspace, participants found themselves unwilling to stay offline and, at the same time, fearing what they would see next. In addition to the lack of a safe haven, the ever-present and ever-evolving nature of online behaviors instilled the view that regardless of whether they heard it or not, it was still visible for everyone to see and, potentially, to add to as they wished.

Social networking was the primary problem according to participants, with Facebook cited as a problem by all but one participant who cited MySpace as a major problem. Regardless of the specific site, social networking behaviors are the primary choice for a desired emotional response. The participants are all still actively involved in social networking and do not blame the technology for their problems, but rather the desire of cyberbullies to expose them to the most public embarrassment available. Through their lived experience, participants conveyed the belief that the interconnectivity provided by social networking provided the ideal forum to expose victims in a manner that would allow for common friends to view their humiliation.

Participants unanimously believe that people behave differently online than they do in person. Participants all reported a belief in disinhibition as they believe that cyberbullies say mean things online that they would never say in person. Anonymity played a major part in the process as participants were again unanimous in believing that hidden identities provide a sense of safety or shield for protection while online. While most described cyberbullying to be a

cowardly act accomplished while hiding, all professed that the notion of anonymity was accurate in explaining behavior. Participants were also unanimous in believing that morality changes online, allowing for a more brutal environment for attacks than the physical realm.

Participants unanimously admitted to having a strong emotional response to the public nature of their cyberbullying victimization. Frustration was the most common response shared, with all participants experiencing high levels of frustration at various times during their victimization as they often didn't know how to react or felt helpless in their ability to stop their victimization. Anger toward the cyberbully was also a major emotional response among participants. A majority of the participants also reported a desire to fight or inflict harm to their cyberbully during their victimization. Several participants reported providing their addresses to the cyberbully in an attempt to incite a fight and get a measure of revenge. A mixture of anger and frustration was revealed by several participants, some of whom chose to take out their anger on inanimate objects in lieu of their cyberbully because the cyberbully was out of physical reach or unknown.

Emotions were not limited to frustration and outward anger. A majority of participants felt isolated or alone during their victimization. Two of the participants reported that they isolated themselves by choice as an attempt to escape victimization. Ostracism was reported by several participants in their former friend groups, as friend groups were forced to choose between a friend in a cyberbully and a friend in the victim. Depression was reported by several participants as well, particularly in connection with isolation and ostracism. Two of the participants reported having trouble getting along with others during their victimization due to broken relationships and problems within friend groups creating a general stress in their lives that was difficult to overcome.



In response to their public victimization, participants struggled to find an appropriate response that saved their self respect and eased their ongoing pain. A large majority of participants attempted to fight back online as a response to their cyberbully. The participants who tried fighting back unanimously believed that it either prolonged or increased the intensity of their victimization. In hindsight, the majority of those who fought back wished that they had chosen another response.

A majority of participants said that the best response is to simply ignore the cyberbullying. They believed that the cyberbully, if left alone, would eventually get bored and stop for lack of eliciting a response. A majority of participants reported having offline arguments, although only one experienced physical violence. A majority of participants chose to try to avoid their cyberbully. Often, an interaction was inevitable because of school and commonalities in friendships. When an encounter eventually occurred, participants were unanimous in feeling anger and anxiety when they next saw their cyberbully.

The results of this study strongly supports Prensky's (2001a; 2001b) finding that a significant digital divide exists between digital natives and digital immigrants in relation to technology through participants' unanimous belief that educational leaders, parents, and law enforcement personnel do not understand cyberbullying. The findings also support Li's (2010) finding that students believe that educational leaders are not equipped to deal with cyberbullying victimization with unanimous support. These results support the findings of both studies. This qualitative study extends from the foundation of those prior findings to demonstrate a significantly greater schism as results show that there is a failure to understand the reality of cyberbullying in the lives of cyberbullying victims and the holistic reality of cyberspace in the daily lives of modern students.

**Blurred line of online-offline contextual reality.** Participants were unanimous in believing that school administrators and law enforcement officers did not fully understand cyberbullying. Participants unanimously indicate that a significant generational divide exists that transcends linguistic differences and technological fluency. In their minds, adults fail to comprehend the reality of cyberspace. Participants believe that adults outside of their generation perceive two realities: the temporal and cyberspace. Participants believe that while educational leaders are fixated on solving real-world problems, they hold an entirely different place in their minds for seemingly distant and virtual reality problems that occur in cyberspace. In the minds of the participants, the two realms are inextricably tied within a new holistic reality conceptualized only by a generation who has grown up with technology as an integral part of their lives.

Participants were unanimous in believing that school administrators cannot do anything about the problem unless it occurs on school grounds. None of the participants mentioned an acceptable use policy at any point. Participants were also unanimous in believing that older generation who have limited experience with technology do not view cyberspace as a real place and are preoccupied with discipline and student health in the physical realm. With the ingrained belief that cyberspace is a separate reality, participants responded strongly and sometimes sarcastically when asked if school leaders or law enforcement officers could do anything to stop cyberbullying. Unanimously, the answer was no.

The results of this study strongly supports Prensky's (2001a; 2001b) finding that a significant digital divide exists between digital natives and digital immigrants in relation to technology through participants' unanimous belief that educational leaders, parents, and law enforcement personnel do not understand cyberbullying. The participants unanimously reported that educational leaders are not equipped to deal with cyberbullying victimization, supporting

Li's (2010) finding that cyberbullying victims believe authority figures to be incapable of addressing online victimization. The results find both studies to be correct and participants reacted to both topics with absolute and unanimous certainty. This qualitative study extends from the foundation of those prior findings to demonstrate a significantly greater schism as results show that there is a failure to understand the reality of cyberbullying in the lives of cyberbullying victims and the holistic reality of cyberspace in the daily lives of modern students.

**Help arises only from those who understand generational reality.** While a majority of participants believe that telling others cannot help stop victimization, two believe that telling others can help. Disturbingly, a majority of the participants conveyed a strong belief that telling authorities can make the problem worse and that the best path is to simply ignore the problem and learn to cope. Rather than risk increasing the severity of attacks, they searched for an alternative route with a group more familiar with cyberspace.

When coping with victimization, participants unanimously turned to their friends. The rationale behind their choice was unanimously trust and the belief that only their friends are capable of understanding what they are going through. Participants unanimously believe that telling the wrong adults can not only fail to help, but can also make the problem worse.

Although all of the participants feared telling some adults, individual participants did tell some people that they trust as they sought to cope. Three of the participants spoke with their parents about their victimization, although only two turned to them on their own. Three of the participants told some of their teachers. Two participants told the principal, although neither instance was done by choice. In both instances, the participants were required to talk after getting into disciplinary trouble in the wake of their victimization. Two participants also told the school

counselor, although only one did so willingly. Only one reached out to law enforcement personnel, doing so only after a threat was made relating to her health and, in her mind, her life.

Participants unanimously turned to their friends for support during their victimization. The results provide strong support to prior findings on coping through trusted friends (Slonje & Smith, 2007; Topcu, Erdur-Baker, & Capa-Aydin, 2008). A majority of participants avoided turning to adults for fear of making the problem worse, providing confirmation for the findings of Li (2010). In addition, a majority of the participants believed that principals did not believe that cyberbullying was a problem worth addressing, confirming the finding of Li (2006a).

Only one participant willingly reported his/her victimization to authorities. The low rate of reporting cyberbullying to authority figures lends support to prior findings on reporting in the United States by Dehue et al. (2008) and Li (2010). In addition, participants unanimously reported a belief that authorities would or could not do anything to stop or end victimization, supporting the findings of Smith et al. (2008). Ultimately, participants chose to turn away from adults because of a significant gap in conceptualizing cyberbullying and understanding technological processes (Prensky, 2001a; Prensky 2001b; Trolley, Hanel, & Shields, 2006).

### **Relationship of the Study to the Theoretical Framework**

**Cyberbullying arises from damaged relationships.** Vygotsky's (1986) socio-cultural theory is based on the belief the social experience of the participant is vitally important to the learning experience. Socio-cultural learning paradigms indicate that learning arises from the social and cultural experiences that students encounter throughout their lives. Broken relationships can be detrimental to socialization and learning. Participants who found themselves in broken relationships and within broken friend groups conveyed a strong belief that socialization problems resulting from broken relationships, ensuing jealousy, and rumors play a

role in starting cyberbullying victimization. In addition, intolerance can break budding relationships, resulting in socialization problems as well. In either instance, disruptions in socio-cultural patterns can impact socialization and disturb the emotional well-being of those involved, especially when problems are played out in a public forum for others to see.

Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs holds that individuals progress through the following stages: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Individuals may not progress upward on the hierarchy until they have achieved complete fulfillment in their current stage. The breakup of friend groups and common socialization patterns naturally inhibit growth into the upper stages as love and belonging are thrown into question with disrupted relationships. Not only are broken relationships dangerous to achieving growth on the hierarchy, but the introduction of cyberbullying victimization on a public stage is particularly disconcerting because participants indicate that it caused them to retreat into the safety stage as they attempted to protect themselves against psychological bullying on a public forum. While only one subject spoke of fearing for her physical safety, the majority of participants fought to escape to an area of safety and participants unanimously sought to find belonging and love among their remaining trustworthy peers.

**Strong emotional actions cause strong emotional reactions.** Throughout the school years, adolescents have traditionally relied on parents and other trustworthy adults for safety concerns (Maslow, 1943), but the traditional safe havens are undercut by the nature of cyberbullying victimization. The lived experience of participants indicates that cyberbullying victimization led to a regression of their position on the hierarchy. Participants admitted to feeling frustration, anger, isolation, ostracism, anxiety, and depression during victimization,

indicating a position requiring basic safety needs to improve their position on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy.

As a result, a majority of the participants attempted to fight back online as a response to their cyberbully, indicating a fight or flight decision forced by a perceived threat to either safety or belonging stage (Maslow, 1943). The participants who tried fighting back unanimously believed that it either prolonged or increased the intensity of their victimization, leaving them feeling more helpless than ever. In hindsight, the majority of those who fought back wished that they had chosen another response, but the pressing severity of their victimization forced a tough choice to either defend their reputation or allow for public humiliation to go unchecked.

Looking back on their experience, a majority of participants said that the best response is to simply ignore the cyberbullying. The response of ignoring cyberbullying stands in stark contrast to the decision that the majority made in fighting back. In hindsight, their experience led them to believe that it would eventually go away. However, the natural instinct that led to a decision to fight back indicated that they were unwilling to allow a psychological assault to go unanswered for fear of losing their vital socio-cultural position among friend groups (Vygotsky, 1986).

Interestingly, all of the victims experienced multiple attacks where they chose to fight back. Although they believed that ignoring was the best response, they still fought back. Ignoring what they perceive to be the best response in the moment of their victimization speaks volumes on the magnitude of the attack within the moments of victimization. The collective best response was continually cast aside in favor of a defensive maneuver to publicly attempt to take back the stages of safety and belonging (Maslow, 1943) that were being publicly taken from them.

Theoretical foundations are complicated by the intricate nature of cyberspace. Participants unanimously agreed that moral disengagement (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Li, 2007a; Li, 2007b) and the disinhibition effect (Kowalski et al., 2008; Mason, 2008) were present in online cyberspace. When morals are shifted due to a change in socio-cultural settings where traditional paradigms are nonexistent or drastically different, the results can be traumatic to socio-cultural processes (Vygotsky, 1986). Participants credited a change in morality and the loss of inhibitions behind a computer screen as making the problem much worse because of extremes in behavior. The desire to achieve safety and belonging and regression to the early stages of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy are not surprising as a result of the differences and extremes of accepted behavior.

**Blurred line of online-offline contextual reality.** Digital immigrants and digital natives have continually perceived technology in different ways (Prensky, 2001a). Difficulties in integrating temporal rules and the complexities of cyberspace have complicated the process of understanding the impact of online behaviors on socialization. The difficulty in integrating the two realms may explain the lack of theoretical connections in cyberbullying studies to date (Tokunaga, 2010).

Based on the viewpoint of participants, the perception of an online and offline reality where offline behaviors are the ultimate focus is a naïve method of approaching the subject. Participants emphasized the reality of online processes in their lives, leading to a significant schism in the conceptualization of cyberspace between generations. In their experience, online behaviors are very much as real and threatening as temporal actions. For example, relationships are no longer simply discussed among those involved and in a private realm. Status updates,

friending, and defriending are all processes of online socialization that transcends cyberspace into a newfound holistic reality of life in the Information Age.

Online behaviors are very real in their lives. Participants believe that those who have not been there and who fail to conceptualize cyberspace as a very real part of their hourly socialization fail to understand how it actually impacts their holistic view of reality. Online behaviors, in their view, are inextricably tied to temporal socialization and reality. Simply put, there is no longer a divide between online and offline. Consequently, all of the rules of socialization and learning must be applied to online behaviors as well as offline. Disturbances in socialization online carry the same weight as disturbances in face to face interaction. Threats to self-esteem and self-actualization online are as much of a threat to mental health as traditional psychological bullying. As a result, digital immigrants must learn to view online processes as a threat equal to temporal actions. Rising toward self-actualization on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy and socio-cultural learning paradigms of Vygotsky (1986) must be considered to be a holistic culmination of the collective lived experience in equally realistic online and offline realms.

**Help arises only from those who understand generational reality.** Participants indicate that help only arises from those who understand the holistic reality of their lived experience online and offline. Traditional influences that understand the socio-cultural and self-actualization needs of students are pushed out of their areas of influence when they need help. Traditionally, parents and educational leaders filled the void and provided safety and love in times of dire need. The perception of a younger generation of adults as people who are entirely disconnected with the severity of online attacks threatens the influence and assistance that was traditionally provided by their homes and schools.



Participants sought to speak to remaining friends as both a place to vent and to confirm their position. In a majority of the cases, participants applauded friends that came to their defense, displaying a desire to achieve a confirmation of love and belonging in a time when their self esteem was brutally attacked in a visible arena. When friends came to their aid, they provided the foundation of safety and love needed according to Maslow (1943) and provided a socio-cultural outlet for expression outlined by Vygotsky (1986). While they were reinforced by the security of close friends, participants remained stalled in a constant search for safety and belonging for the duration of their victimization.

Unfortunately, adults were pushed aside in most cases as participants searched for outlets and assistance. Participants viewed adults as incompetent to address the issues raised through online venues. Parents, teachers, and law enforcement were seen as incapable of providing assistance or stopping cyberbullying. Disconcertingly, adults were feared by the majority of participants as a threat to make the situation worse due to their naivety of online interaction and the shortcomings in understanding the holistic reality of the younger generation.

### **Limitations**

This hermeneutic phenomenological study is limited in three specific areas. First, the site of the study must be considered a geographical limitation. Regardless of the geographic location, researching the intricacies of cyberspace is difficult to arrange in a comprehensive fashion. Cyberspace has the unusual and unpredictable ability to transcend geography, requiring a rearrangement of traditional research paradigms to study in any meaningful fashion. Choosing a geographic location of any nature only provides a partial picture of the processes of online behavior, but the chosen location provided a foundation for the generalizability of the repercussions of cyberbullying victimization online as well as any other geographic location.

Being in the infant stages, research is unclear how demographical and cultural factors may impact cyberbullying victimization. As other locations could demonstrate changes in demography and specific cultural attributes that may differ from the chosen site, the site must be acknowledged as a limitation.

School districts are particularly protective of minors under their charge, especially in delicate emotional situations. In order to address the concern of finding participants, I decided to include only participants over 18 years of age. Ideally, current students would have been the participants for the study. While the decision creates some limitations in participants, it addresses some ethical concerns that are more disconcerting when studying minors. In order to limit the time differential between victims and their victimization, only recent graduates from the prior year at the chosen site were used in the study. Concern may exist that the participants being studied are too far removed from the time of victimization to form a comprehensive account of their reactions. While this concern may be tempered with the finding that psychological bullying victims remember their victimization for over a decade (Olweus, 1993), the concern must still be acknowledged as having the potential to limit the accuracy of the immediate impact of cyberbullying victimization on participants.

The utilization of a sample size of 8 participants creates a limitation. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling based on a shared experience. While gender, socioeconomics, and scholastic achievement were naturally balanced, the ethnic makeup of the study does not match the general makeup of the school due to only having one African-American participant. Differences in demographical and cultural factors that greatly differ from the relatively small sample size utilized in the study could limit the generalizability of the study to other sites and populations. The small sample size raises the possibility that overgeneralizations

could be revealed in the perspectives of the sampled participants. Future studies on cyberbullying victimization could seek to broaden the findings of this study by examining a group of participants of more racially and culturally diverse backgrounds.

### **Implications for Practice**

This hermeneutic phenomenological study supported a disturbing trend that cyberbullying victims report cyberbullying to adults at a very low rate (Dehue et al., 2008; Li, 2010). The low rate of reporting can be attributed to a belief that adults are not capable of solving the problem (Smith et al., 2008) and the belief that adults can make the problem worse (Li, 2010), both prior studies confirmed by this qualitative study. In order to change the rates, educational leaders must change the perceptions of students concerning the ability of adults to address cyberbullying.

In order to change their perceptions, educational leaders must revisit their paradigms of reality. Educational leaders must learn to look at reality in a holistic manner. In the minds of cyberbullying victims, their victimization was a real part of their lives, not an occurrence in a distant and unfathomable location. Victimization was an ever-present part of their lives in the interconnected holistic view. Cyberbullying was not simply enacted on a random computer screen. Cyberbullying victimization circulated among friend groups, left messages on smartphones, updated, grew, evolved, and remained continually visible to anyone who cared to view. The attacks were not something that could be removed or disconnected, but a living entity that was formed and visibly grew to a huge problem formed by bullies not constrained by traditional social norms. Victimization was huge, ever-present, and inescapable. It may not be a physical encounter on school grounds, but it was worse than traditional bullying in the lived experience of most participants. School leaders must learn to recognize the severity of

cyberbullying victimization before tragedy strikes their students. It will require educational leaders to realize the magnitude of the event and approach the lived experience of students from a holistic perspective rather than the traditional offline or online viewpoint. In the mind of the modern student, the two are indeed part of one lived experience.

This phenomenological study found that the participants do not believe that educational leaders think cyberbullying to be a problem because it is based in cyberspace, confirming the finding of Li (2006). In order to start changing the minds of students, educational leaders must make a concerted effort to address cyberbullying in their school. Whether it be speaking to the students directly or bringing in experts to address the topic within schools, educational leaders must start the process of reaching out to students by communicating with them that cyberbullying is a concern within their school.

In order to build confidence in students, educational leaders must modify acceptable use agreements to include cyberbullying victimization both on and off campus. After updating the acceptable use agreements, educational leaders need to make students and parents aware of the regulations of technology use within their schools. Attacks on students, regardless of the location or where the attack is made, can be punished. If students are aware of the ability of the school to address cyberbullying both on and off campus, they are more likely to have a positive opinion of the ability of educational leaders to address cyberbullying and protect their students. If students gain faith in the ability of educational leaders to conceptualize and address cyberbullying, the rate of reporting could rise from the current abysmal levels.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Cyberbullying victimization remains a new genre of research with a multitude of gaps. When I began this study, I conceived of an online and offline reality in which cyberbullying

victimization manifests itself in the lives of victims. The results of this study suggest that my mindset, as well the mindset of most educational leaders, was incorrectly formulated based on a traditionally aligned pattern. The results of this study suggest that a new holistic paradigm is needed in order to accurately address cyberbullying victimization. Future researchers may elect to conduct a grounded theory study in order to add to the findings of this study. Repetitive data collection common to grounded theory studies may provide additional validation of the holistic theory produced by the results of this study.

Each of the themes produced by this study offer a variety of new avenues in need of exploration. The view of the participants of this study that damaged relationships cause victimization to start presents several avenues for exploration. Future researchers could help determine why cyberbullying originates from failed romantic relationships, failed friendships, fractured friend groups, or prejudice. Future researchers could also provide insight into the details of how rumors and gossip contribute to the origin and evolution of cyberbullying victimization as indicated by the participants in this study.

Further qualitative research is also needed in relation to the finding that cyberbullying is a strong emotional action that leads to strong emotional reactions. While quantitative research has explored emotional reactions to cyberbullying, qualitative studies could add much needed depth into the specific issues concerning the intensity of the emotional impact and the emotional reaction of cyberbullying victims. In addition, qualitative and quantitative researchers could delve deeper into the concepts of moral disengagement and the disinhibition effect in relation to online behavior. Further insight is needed in those specific areas in order to more fully understand the unanimous shift in online behaviors found by this study.

In addition to researching the holistic viewpoint of reality through a grounded theory study, future researchers could elect to conduct research comparing the mindsets of authority figures and cyberbullying victims. Further research could work to determine whether the perception of separate realities by school leaders matches the perception of cyberbullying victims. In addition, law enforcement officers and parents could also be included in studies to determine whether a major divide exists across authority figures in the lives of cyberbullying victims.

Future researchers could also elect to provide further insight into why cyberbullying victims choose to turn to peers rather than authority figures. Research on how authority figures would react to cyberbullying situations through case study research would be a potentially promising avenue of research in determining whether participant fears of worsening the problem are justified. Research in that area could potentially provide valuable insight into methods that authority figures could use to raise the level of trust between the generations as well as methods to relate to a new generation in order to foster higher rates of reporting and addressing cyberbullying behaviors across the board.

### **Researcher's Reflections**

In conducting this hermeneutic phenomenological study, I gained several insights into the phenomenon through collecting data in a digital medium. Researching cyberbullying victimization through online data collection transcends traditional procedures to say the least. While there are benefits to conducting online data and on cyberbullying, the new medium presents specific new challenges. In the following section, I list and explain the challenges that I experienced in order to assist researchers that may choose to conduct qualitative studies on the subject in the future.

Online data collection takes considerable care in order to provide anonymity and accurate data collection. In this study, I chose to conduct individual interviews on Second Life prior to the focus group interviews on Second Live in order to provide participants with an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the procedures of the site. All steps must be clearly thought out, especially the focus group sessions. Although I was audio taping the focus group sessions, I chose to write down the name of the person speaking and the first two words that they were saying as a way to make sure that I did not confuse data by different participants during transcription. My choice in this matter turned out to be vitally important and I would suggest that anyone conducting data in such a manner think in the same direction.

Online research is fraught with potential dangers to participants, especially in connection with a sensitive subject. Security procedures must be well thought out and implemented, pseudo names must be coordinated, and participants must be familiarized beforehand. During the initial meeting with participants to sign consent, I gave them a tour of the procedures of Second Life and Twitter to insure that they were aware of the procedures for effectively using the site. For security, I conducted all interviews and focus group sessions on my privately owned Achila Skyland within Second Life that was fully equipped with a security orb. The security orb only allowed the users that I entered into the security panel into the room at any point in time. In addition, all participants utilized pseudo names during the study. They had different pseudo names during different phases of the study that only I knew. I had to know for the purpose of data triangulation, but no other participant was given any indication of the identities of other participants.

Objectivity is vitally important during the data collection process. Due to the lack of research in my area, I felt as though I did not know enough to be influenced by prior studies as I

started data collection. As I started collecting data, I kept a reflexivity log that I wrote in after each interview session. I reminded myself to remain neutral and not to familiarize myself with information and transcribing data until data collection was complete. As a result, I did not know any of the thematic connections that I found until after the collection was complete. Through these methods, I was able to remain objective until the end of the data collection period.

Qualitative researchers must be flexible, especially when dealing with young adults with job schedules that are largely out of their control. Ideally, I would have conducted one large focus group session so that everyone could discuss experiences in a shared forum. In reality, I conducted two sessions on different days and at different times in an attempt to allow the majority of the participants to attend a session. Fortunately, all but one participant were able to make it to a focus group session.

### **Conclusion**

This phenomenological study sought to assist educational leaders in addressing the problem of cyberbullying, a growing phenomenon that can cause intense physical and psychological problems (Kowalski et al., 2008). The investigation was conducted from a hermeneutic approach to help educational leaders understand the problems of digital natives. I served as a hermeneutic bridge between two generations that fail to understand the role of technology in the lived experience from the perspective of the other (Prensky, 2001a). The hermeneutic bridge that I formed is intended to provide educational leaders with an insight into the lived experience of cyberbullying victims through the lived experience of the participants.

The results of this study make significant contributions to a fledgling field of research. The results reveal that relationships broken by a number of reasons can result in a desire to exact revenge on their former friend or companion. The popular and visible nature of the internet



presents the perfect forum. Attacks can be brutal and impossible to avoid in the experience of cyberbullying victims. They can lead to dangerous emotions and problem behaviors if the problem is not adequately addressed.

Unfortunately, cyberbullying victims do not trust authority figures. Cyberbullying victims expressed a unanimous belief that a perceptual divide in reality exists between generations. Participants in this study believed that only the physical realm was a real consideration to authority figures. They believed that authority figures, including educational leaders, thought of cyberspace as a distant entity rather than an integral part of their daily lives. As a result, participants believed authority figures to be incompetent and incapable of addressing the concern. Participants believed that they would only become concerned if it became physical or if physical threats arose.

As a result, participants chose to turn to those who understood their holistic paradigm of reality: friends. Participants primarily viewed friends as an opportunity to vent as well as a source of support. In several cases, cyberbullying victims looked to their friends to form a protective shield around them online and offline, offering a heightened sense of safety and self-esteem in a time of psychological turmoil.

If educational leaders are determined to make a difference in addressing the dangerous phenomenon of cyberbullying, they would be well advised to consider the results of this study. If educational leaders hope to raise the rate of reporting, they must first understand the viewpoint of the victim in terms of reality. Doing so may take a monumental shift in their personal paradigms of reality. To identify with a generation of digital natives, educational leaders and researchers in the field must take into consideration that Information Age viewpoints of reality are drastically different than previous generations in the eyes of cyberbullying victims.

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## **APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORMS**

### **CONSENT FORM**

A Phenomenological Investigation of the Origination and Manifestation of the  
Cyberbully/Cyberbullying Victim Relationship from the Perspective of Cyberbullying Victims  
Doctoral Dissertation  
Michael Boyd  
Liberty University  
Department of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of cyberbullying victimization. You were selected as a possible participant because of an incident of victimization during your time in high school. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Michael Murray Boyd, a doctoral student at Liberty University  
Department of Education.

### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to examine the origination of cyberbullying victimization and the manifestation of cyberbullying victimization in the online and offline lived experience of participants who were cyberbullying victims.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

In the first stage of research, you will be asked to participate in an interview session in Second Life. Your interview will be audio taped and transcribed by the primary researcher. Afterward, you will be asked to submit journal writings of any thoughts that you may have on Twitter in the month after the interview session to the researcher through blogging. You will also be asked to participate in a focus group activity conducted via Second Life. Throughout the process, only the primary researcher will know your identity.

In total, you should expect to meet with the researcher online once for the interview, in an online group session once, and submit online journal entries of your thoughts after a month has expired.

### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**



The study has several risks: First, the study may invoke emotions that have not been revisited for some time. While time may have healed the wounds, the possibility of emotional responses remains a risk that must be noted; Second, illegal responses may require reporting to legal authorities. If the information revealed during the study are reportable actions that involve cyberstalking or other abusive actions that must be reported, your information will be reported to the appropriated legal authorities. While the direction questions will not steer responses in this direction, your answers may require reporting if you deviate from the direction of the study.

**Injury or Illness** Liberty University will not provide medical treatment or financial compensation if you are injured or become ill as a result of participating in this research project. This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence.

The benefits to participation are: There are no tangible benefits connected with participation in the study.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Your name will never be used in connection with the reporting of the research.

Every precaution will be used to insure your privacy is protected. Your name and the name of your school will never be used in connection with the reporting of the research.

Interview data on digital tapes will be transcribed and digitally removed as soon as transcription is complete. Only the primary researcher will have access to your tapes and transcripts. The transcripts will be stored in a locked fireproof safe until the transcripts are completely analyzed and reported in the dissertation defense.

With any study, confidentiality has some limits. As long as the interview and journal writings do not require illegal actions that must be reported to authorities, the information shared shall not be revealed to any outside sources.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researchers conducting this study are: Michael Boyd and Dr. Lisa Reason. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at Liberty University, (419)724-3391 or [lreason@liberty.edu](mailto:lreason@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at [fgarzon@liberty.edu](mailto:fgarzon@liberty.edu).

***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent or guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
*(If minors are involved)*

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B: VALIDITY

### Content Validity

#### **Individual Interview Questions.**

Questions 1-5 are designed to ascertain the origin of cyberbullying victimization, providing an answer to the first research question of the study. Questions 1 and 2 seek to collect core information about the participants' experience in areas where fundamental disagreements exist in literature. Cyberbullying experts have found that defining cyberbullying is a difficult task with the speed of change common in information technology (Shariff, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). The resulting information is designed to determine whether fundamental differences exist among those impacted by cyberbullying share the same differences in definition. Question 2 is asked to seek a deeper idea of the grade range where cyberbullying is common. Research indicates that cyberbullying is common at the middle grades and early high school years (Tokunaga, 2010), but few studies have sought to focus upon the upper grades to determine the extent of cyberbullying in the latter years of the secondary experience.

Questions 3-5 are designed to gather information about the first research question pertaining to the origination of cyberbullying victimization. Question 3 focuses upon whether a prior relationship existed between the cyberbully and the cyberbullying victim as well as the extent of any preexisting relationship. Research indicates that preexisting relationships are often a cause of cyberbullying victimization (Kowalski et al., 2008). Question 3 seeks to determine whether a preexisting relationship may have played a role in victimization and delves into whether online or offline relationships may have been a factor. Building upon the basis of question 3, question 4 seeks to determine whether there was a known cause of victimization

online or offline. Question 5 seeks to determine the number of instances as well as time frame involved in the participants' experience, another area lacking in cyberbullying research.

Questions 6-12 are designed to determine the contextual aspects of the cyberbullying incident and how the victimization may or may not have carried over into the physical world of the participant, working together to answer the second research question. Question 6 seeks to determine where the cyberbullying took place in cyberspace and the specific avenues of attack that the cyberbully may have taken in attacking the victim online. The subsections 6a-f seek to determine which of the most commonly utilized avenues of attack were utilized while subsection 6g provides an opportunity for participants to include any new technological possibilities as an answer as cyberbullying avenues are constantly shifting (Shariff, 2008).

Questions 7 and 8 focus on the emotions that may appear in the wake of cyberbullying victimization. Question 7a is designed to determine whether a physical confrontation took place after the victimization, which is a commonplace occurrence with cyberbullying (Kowalski et al., 2008; Shariff, 2008). Question 7b-d investigates the common problems that often occur within prior friend groups that are commonly impacted by cyberbullying and the difficulty that some cyberbullying victims have in maintaining and repairing damaged relationships after victimization. All sections of Question 8 pertain to the intrinsic emotional damage that may have resulted directly from cyberbullying victimization as well as the fallout of broken friendships (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000; Tokunaga, 2010; Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2006; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006).

Question 9 focuses on the disinhibition effect of online behavior. Cyberbullies may engage in behaviors online that are far more morally disengaged than the behaviors they exhibit offline (Kowalski et al., 2008; Mason, 2008). Hiding behind screen names, cyberbullies gain a sense of

anonymity that allows them to feel free to say things that they would not normally say in daily life offline (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Li, 2007a, Li, 2007b). Question 9 seeks to determine whether participants believe that the disinhibition effect may have been a factor in their experience.

Questions 10 and 11 focus on the bullying history of the participant and possible comparisons to cyberbullying. Question 10 seeks to determine if participants have been subjected to offline bullying in their past, which is often the case in cyberbullying (Kowalski et al., 2008). Question 10a seeks to determine whether a connection exists between offline and online bullying in the experience of the participant, a trend that has been indicated to exist by quantitative research on cyberbullying (Li, 2010). Question 11 asks for the participant to compare cyberbullying and traditional bullying, seeking to provide depth to the indication that cyberbullying is worse in the mind of the victim (Keith & Martin, 2005; Kowalski et al, 2008; Van der wal, 2003).

Question 12 seeks to determine how cyberbullying victimization may have impacted the educational experience of participants. Research is inconclusive on the topic of academic impacts of cyberbullying victimization, although studies have indicated that confrontations following cyberbullying instances often result in discipline issues as reflected in 12e. Questions 12a-d focus on gaining clarification from participants on areas of research where quantitative studies have found differing results (Tokunaga, 2010).

Questions 13-25 focus on the coping strategies employed by participants in overcoming their cyberbullying victimization. Question 13a-b seeks to determine who participants turned to for help in coping and activities that helped to ease the pain. Research has indicated that cyberbullying victims often turn to others for help and often need to get their mind off of the

issue (Kowalski et al., 2008). Question 13c allows for participants to discuss anything else that may have helped in the coping process that is not discussed in current research.

Questions 14-16 are designed to focus on the help that was sought by participants and the reaction that they received from those that they told. Research indicates that most cyberbullying victims seek emotional help from someone not involved in victimization, most commonly their friends (Slonje & Smith, 2007; Topcu, Erdur-Baker, & Capa-Aydin, 2008). Question 15 seeks to expand on current research that indicates that adults are often not informed because most cyberbullying victims believe that they cannot help (Li, 2010; Smith et al., 2008). Question 14a-f lists commonly researched groups while 14g leaves an avenue for participants to discuss groups that they may have told not included in most studies to date in a topic lacking in research (Kowalski et al., 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Tokunaga, 2010). Question 16 seeks to expand on the prior findings that adults cannot help by asking participants about the responses that they received and whether or not the responses were sufficient in their minds.

Questions 17 and 18 seek to determine whether the people that participants told were able to stop the cyberbullying and whether or not telling someone was worth it. Research indicates that many cyberbullying victims believe that telling adults will only increase the scope and severity of their victimization (Li, 2010). Question 17 and 17a seek to determine how each group may have helped or failed to help, providing insight into whether the perception toward adults found in quantitative research is accurate in the experience of participants. Question 18 focuses on whether telling people was worth the effort or if they simply wish that they had kept it inside, seeking to provide depth on Li's (2010) finding that telling adults can increase the severity of attacks rather than solving the problem.

In many cases, cyberbullying victims choose to cope by attacking back either online or offline. Research has found that while victims choose to respond by blocking their cyberbully in up to 75% of cases (Smith et al., 2008), some victims choose a more aggressive pattern of retaliation. Cyberbullying victims, in an attempt to save face, will often become cyberbullies themselves and turn the tables on their attacker online (Li, 2006a). Question 19 seeks to determine whether the participants may have engaged in confrontational methods online themselves in attempting to cope with their own victimization. In other cases, research indicates that cyberbullying victims often choose to confront their attackers upon their next meeting offline (Kowalski et al., 2008; Shariff, 2008). Question 20 and 21 seek to determine whether offline confrontation was an experience chosen by participants reacting to online victimization and the consequences of their choice to confront their cyberbully offline.

Research suggests that a significant digital divide exists between students and authority figures born in a different technological era (Prensky, 2001a). Research has shown that the generational gap leads to a general belief among cyberbullying victims that adults fail to understand and cannot solve the problem of cyberbullying (Li, 2010), resulting in disturbingly low rates of reporting among American students (Dehue et al, 2006; Tokunaga, 2010). Question 22 seeks to determine whether participant perceived school leaders as a different generation that could not understand the concept of online victimization. Working to expand upon the prior question, Question 23 is designed to determine whether school leaders are capable of helping to stop cyberbullying in the mind of their former students. Question 24 follows the same thought patterns as participants are questioned on whether law enforcement officers, most commonly from a different technological era as well, are able to understand and stop cyberbullying in the same manner as school leaders.

Question 25 seeks to provide closure to the interview by asking the participant why they chose to participate in the study. In choosing to participate, participants were asked to recall events and painful experiences from the past. Participants may choose to highlight the major aspects of their victimization that they would like to save others from or other relevant information through general reflection on why they chose to participate. Participants in prior studies often chose to participate in part to prevent future occurrences as well as to reveal the shortcomings of authority figures in solving their victimization, providing a sense of closure and final coping in their cyberbullying victimization (Kowalski et al., 2008).

### **Focus Group Interview Questions.**

The focus group interview questions were designed to foster discussion within the focus group in order to elaborate on the questions posed in the individual interview portion of the study. The questions were designed to closely resemble the individual interview questions while taking a more open-ended approach to foster discussion among participants. While the individual questions asked probing questions directed by specific prompts, the focus group questions eliminated the specific terminology in order to allow for the participants to more actively determine the path of discussion.

Focus group questions 1-3 follow the pattern established by individual interview questions 1-5 in answering the research question on the origination of cyberbullying victimization. Focus group question 1 seeks to compare the grade where the cyberbullying victimization began and asks participants to elaborate on their experience and whether some grades are more prone to victimization than others. The purpose of focus group question 1 is to gather more information in order to provide insight on Tokunaga's (2010) finding that middle grades and early high school years are more prone to victimization. Focus group question 2 seeks to provide elaboration on



the origination of the cyberbully/cyberbullying victim relationship in order to provide qualitative insight into the belief that preexisting relationships are a common cause of cyberbullying victimization (Kowalski et al., 2008). Focus group question 3 seeks to provide elaboration on the same idea as the prior question by asking participants to elaborate on the causes of cyberbullying victimization from their personal experience, providing an opportunity for participants to provide possible connections between victimization from prior relationships as well as anonymous or unknown bullies.

Focus group questions 4-7 follow the pattern established by individual interview questions 6-12 in seeking answers to the second research question concerning the contextual aspects of cyberbullying victimization and online carryover to the physical world. Focus group question 4 focuses on the avenues of attack with an additional probing question into whether some avenues are more hurtful than others, a position taken by Kowalski et al. (2008) in relation to the particularly harmful impact of visual forms of cyberbullying victimization. Focus group question 5 seeks to foster elaboration on the social and emotional feelings brought about by cyberbullying victimization, providing for qualitative elaboration on the social and emotion fallout documented by quantitative research (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000; Tokunaga, 2010; Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2006; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006).

Focus group question 6 seeks to foster group elaboration on the disinhibition effect (Kowalski et al., 2008; Mason, 2008) and the moral disengagement resulting from anonymity (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Li, 2007a; Li, 2007b) found by quantitative researchers by asking the focus group whether people act differently online and for an explanation of their answer. Focus group question 7 asks the focus group to compare traditional bullying and cyberbullying, seeking

to promote discussion indicating whether or not cyberbullying is worse in the mind of the participant (Keith & Martin, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2008; Van der wal, 2003).

Focus group questions 8-17 follow the pattern established by individual interview questions 13-25 in answering the third research question by seeking information on the coping strategies employed by cyberbullying victims. Focus group question 8 seeks to determine the paths that participants took to cope with victimization with an open-ended question that will seek to determine whether talking to others was the primary means of coping (Kowalski et al., 2008).

Focus group questions 9, 10, 11, 12, 15 and 16 investigate who victims told, if they were satisfied with the response, whether telling people stopped the victimization, and whether it was worth the effort to reach out to other people. The purpose of focus group questions 9, 10, 11, and 12 was to investigate whether they preferred to turn to friends (Slonje & Smith, 2007; Topcu, Erdur-Baker, & Capa-Aydin, 2008) and whether telling others helped solve the problem. Focus group questions 15 and 16 investigate whether adults were perceived not to be trustworthy figures that could understand and solve issues in cyberspace (Li, 2010; Smith et al., 2008) by a younger generation with many differences in the perception of technology (Prensky, 2001a; Prensky, 2001b).

Focus group questions 13 and 14 allow the participants to elaborate on their response to the cyberbully in both offline and online settings. Quantitative researchers have found that while many cyberbullying victims simply choose to block their attackers (Smith et al., 2008), victims have also been found to respond through becoming cyberbullies themselves (Li, 2006a) or initiating a physical confrontation to save face after an online attack (Kowalski et al., 2008; Shariff, 2008).

Question 17 seeks to provide closure to the focus group interview. Participants are asked to discuss why cyberbullying studies are important in the context of their experience. In addition to providing participants the opportunity to shed light on the importance of the subject, the question allows participants to highlight the most impactful aspects of their cyberbullying victimization through a group discussion and provide additional relevant information that may have been missed in the specific set of focus group interview questions.

### **Face Validity**

In order to insure face validity, I secured a panel of experts possessing doctoral degrees in the field to read the interview questions and provide feedback. The selected panel of experts in the field consisted of Dr. James Arnold, Dr. Eddie Bennett, Dr. Glen Blankenship, Dr. Debbie Daniell, and Dr. Deanna Keith. Brendan Cox provided a review from the perspective of a potential participant not included in the review.

In the validity testing process, cognitive interviews were conducted to determine if the questions posed were sensible through the initial reading process (Dolman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). In addition, the selected experts were asked to provide any reflective feedback that may arise after the reading after each individual had time to reflect upon the questions. The cognitive interview process was initiated with Dr. James Arnold on August 29, Dr. Eddie Bennett on September 9, Dr. Glen Blankenship on August 31, Dr. Debbie Daniell on August 22, and Dr. Deanna Keith on August 21. All initial and reflective thoughts were noted and recorded for reflection.

All of the experts shared a common belief that the set of questions are clear and well written, but there were suggestions by all of the experts. The primary concern raised was a unanimous finding of one major wording flaw as a result of a typographical error. Question 15f

of the individual interview question component contained the phrase “law enforcement activities” rather than the intended “law enforcement officers”. After receiving their feedback, the error was promptly corrected.

The second point of concern was raised by Dr. Blankenship, Dr. Bennett, and Dr. Daniell on the choice of ostracism in 7b of the Individual Interview questions. The primary concern was whether high school graduates were able to understand and know the definition of the word ostracism and whether a misunderstanding would hamper their ability to answer the question accurately. After careful consideration and asking the advice of my chair, I decided that the literature clearly supports the concept of ostracism above any possible synonym that may lead to an indication of a less serious repercussion of cyberbullying victimization. At the advice of my chair and in an effort to satisfy the legitimate concern of the experts who raised the point, a definition of ostracism was made available to participants.

Dr. Keith, Dr. Blankenship, Dr. Bennett, and Dr. Daniell also expressed a concern over the numbering in the focus group questions. As the individual and focus group questions were combined to reduce the amount of files that had to be downloaded, a technical error caused problems with the numbering on the focus group interview questions. As soon as the concern was raised, I informed them that it was only an unintentional technical error and that I would ensure that the error would be fixed as the documents were separated into their separate roles in the research process.

**APPENDIX C: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS****Carly Individual Interview**

1. Tell me about yourself.

What is your age? 19

Which race or ethnicity do you most closely identify with? White

What are your career goals? Communication disorders. I am an SLP major.

Describe the technology that you commonly use in your personal life? Cell, Computer

2. What did you enjoy the most about high school? Friends

3. How would you describe yourself during your scholastic experience at Pineland High School? (School name is not really Pineland High...I only did this to maintain confidentiality within the appendix of the dissertation.)

How were your grades in high school? Great.

Did you get in trouble in high school that resulted in In-School or Out-Of-School

Suspension? Never. I think I am the only one who was never in ISS.

If yes, did you get in trouble that resulted in ISS or OSS in some years more than others? Which years did you have the most disciplinary problems?

4. How did you feel about the teachers and administrators at your school?

Were they demanding of you academically? Yeah. Most all were.

Do you think that they cared about you and your success? Yeah.

Did you trust them? Yeah, especially a few of them that were really like parent as much as teachers.

5. Describe the frequency of your technology use in high school for each of the following prompts.

Cell Phones (Including Text Messaging) All the time. I still do. I would be late to work if I have to, but I would go back home if I left it. Can't live without it.

Social Networking All of the time. It goes straight to my phone.

Chat Rooms No

Instant Messaging Only on Facebook

Video Sharing No.

Email Not really. More for college than anything.

***Read and provide a copy of the cyberbullying definition of Parry Aftab at this point.***

Cyberbullying occurs “when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones”.

1. Describe your definition of cyberbullying. I agree, but adults can get involved too.
2. What grade(s) were you in when you were cyberbullied? 12th
3. Did you know the bully(s) beforehand? Yes
  - a. Did you know him/her offline? If yes, please elaborate. The worst one was someone who was in my ex fiancé’s family.
  - b. Did you know them online? If yes, please elaborate. One. I really didn’t know here at all offline, but she apparently knew me.
  - c. Where did you get to know them first? One on one off.
  - d. How long did you know them? One for a year or so, the other a month or so online.
  - e. Did you consider the cyberbully to be a friend of yours?

4. What caused your cyberbullying victimization to start? One because I defriended her on Facebook, the other was because she was having a difficult time in her life and she seemed jealous of my relationship.
  - a. Were there offline causes? If yes, please elaborate.
  - b. Were there online causes? If yes, please elaborate. Defriending on Facebook.
5. How many times were you cyberbullied? Only 2 times.
  - a. Over what period of time? One lasted maybe a day and the other went on for a months.
6. Please explain how each method was used to cyberbully you online as I give you a prompt. If a method was not used to cyberbully you, just tell me.
  - a. Cell Phone I had I had Facebook connected to my phone, so I guess that counts. I also had texts and calls to my phone. I thought it was over with, but a few months later she started to go back at it with me again through texts.
  - b. Social Network The not so bad one got bad because I defriended her on Facebook. She sent a few nasty messages because I removed a lot of people that I really did not know from my friend list and she was one of them. That one really wasn't that bad though.

The other was really bad. It was on Facebook time and again. It even got to the point that she said my initials and said that I would wind up in the back of an ambulance and she would be in handcuffs. It was really bad and really scary and it was all so public. She used my initials, but everyone knew exactly who she was talking about.

- c. Instant Messaging She did send me some private messages through Facebook. She even threatened to call the law on me when she was the one who made the threats.
  - d. Chat Room No
  - e. Email No
  - f. Video Sharing No
  - g. Was any other method used that I did not mention? Please explain. No
7. Did the cyberbullying lead to issues offline? A few.
- a. Did it lead to an argument or physical confrontation of any sort? Please explain. No, but only because I have only seen her once. I probably would have gotten into an argument with her, but it was at a funeral and regardless of our problems, it would not have been appropriate.
  - b. Did you feel ostracized? No. Even in her family, everyone knew that I did not start it or say anything that wasn't true.
  - c. Did you feel isolated? Yes, when I was alone. I told her to come meet me and we would finish the problem. I told her where I lived. When my fiancée went to work, I did feel isolated and worried that she would try to harm me.
  - d. Did you have trouble getting along with others during your victimization? Other than them, no.
8. Explain how the victimization made you feel.
- a. Were you depressed? No.
  - b. Were you angry? Yes. I wanted to break her face. I gave her my address and begged her to come over.



- c. Were you frustrated? Oh yes. I could not get on Facebook or my phone without getting messages from her and postings by her. I wanted to get away, but I didn't want to miss any important calls or anything. I couldn't get away because as long as I was around a computer or my phone it was always there. Even when I wasn't around my phone, I knew that it was still going on and it really bothered me. I just feels like there is absolutely nothing you can do about it until they get tired of messing with you or they find someone else to move on to.
9. Do you believe that people act differently online than they do offline? If yes, continue to prompts. Definitely.
- a. Do you think that having a hidden identity impacts their behavior online? Yes. They know that they can say things online and claim it is not them. They can do pretty much anything and if you try to do something about it in person, they want to call in the law because they will have an excuse and it will be your fault.
- b. Do you think that people say mean things online that they would not say offline? Yes. If they would say those things in person, something would be done about it.
- c. Do the morals of people change when they are online? It is like they become a different person, but you can't. She knew that I cared about school, my future , and my reputation.
10. Were you bullied in your in school years in ways other than cyberbullying? If yes, prompt. Yes
- a. Was there a connection between the bullying and your cyberbullying victimization? No. that was more middle school.

11. How would you say that cyberbullying compares to traditional bullying? Online is far worse. In regular bullying, it is more of a physical thing and few people see it. They attack so violently online using so much against you, but you wonder what else they may say. I was afraid because I have skeletons in my closet like everyone else and as much damage as they do, you always just want it to end before they can do any more. I was really scared because I was really afraid that she would put more out on me.
12. Explain how you coped with the emotions related to cyberbullying. Mostly by talking.
- a. Who did you turn to? Friends and family.
    - i. Why did you choose to turn to them? I needed to vent. Some saw it and asked what was going on, so I told them. Basically, I just needed to talk with people that I trust.
  - b. Did you find any activities or pastimes that helped? No really. I was always too busy with activities, school stuff, and work.
  - c. What else seemed to help? Nothing really.
13. Please explain how your experience with cyberbullying victimization impacted your performance in school in each of the following areas.
- a. Distraction I don't really remember it, but I may have been distracted at times. I have sort of a one-track mind.
  - b. Grades No. My grades were fine.
  - c. State Mandated Tests Not at all.
  - d. Attendance No. Neither one didn't go to school with me, so it wasn't a problem.
  - e. Trouble resulting in discipline No.
14. Did you tell anyone about your victimization? Yes.

15. Please explain why you decided to tell or not to tell each of the following groups of individuals listed below (please input your answer beside the prompt).

- a. Friends I saw that as a chance to vent. Some actually took up for me. She turned and started to attack my friends that spoke up and started a bunch of rumors and drama about them as well.
- b. Parents My mom saw it. She just wanted to know what was going on. I also talked to my fiancée's parents about it as well.
- c. Teachers I told one, mostly because he was like a father figure to me. He talked to me and told me that I should report it.
- d. School administrators No. I didn't trust them. They would probably try to do some paperwork on it taking everyone's account and all, but since the people didn't go to school with me, there is really nothing that they can do. Even if she did go to school with me, I wouldn't have told them.
- e. Counselors No. Besides going in once a year or so for scheduling, I really didn't know that we even had a counselor. It never struck me to talk to her and we didn't have a relationship to speak of for me to trust her.
- f. Law enforcement officers I did tell them, but not to get them involved. The person that was messing with me said that she was going to report me for what I said back, so I asked an officer if I had done anything that I could get arrested for. He said that I had not and I left it at that.
- g. Are there any other people that you told that did not fall into one of these groups? I talked to my fiancée. Even though it was in his family, he was great about supporting me because he knew I was right.

16. What reaction did you receive from those you told about cyberbullying? Were you satisfied with their response? For the most part. Actually, I would say yes. I was happy with their support.
17. Did telling people about the cyberbullying stop the cyberbullying? No.
- How did each individual or group that you told help or fail to help? There is really nothing they can do besides talk to you and try to take up for you. Their advice helped me through it, but they did not stop it. It just seems to stop with some people when they get bored with it or when they move on to getting someone else.
18. Was it worth the effort to tell people? Yes
- Do you wish you had told more people? Yes, I do. I wish I had let more people know how she was because of what she was stirring up online. I was like she made me look so bad but she never really got hit with anything because my responses were all private.
  - Do you wish you had not told some people? No.
19. Did you respond to the bully online after you were cyberbullied? Yes.
- If yes, how? I fought back, but privately. I did not post anything about her online for the world to see. She criticized me for being a bad Christian and all of that. I pointed out that everyone sins and I mentioned some of her sins to her, but I didn't take her business public like she did to me. I did say some mean things and call her bad things, but it was all done privately. I was scared that if I made it public, things would get way worse.
  - If no, what was the result?

20. Did you respond to the bully offline after you were cyberbullied? Not really. I only saw her at a funeral. I just pretty much ignored her.
- a. If yes, how?
21. Did it result in any problems or feelings the next time that you met the cyberbully face to face? Of course. When you see them there is going to be some bad feelings, but it wasn't the right place to address the issue with an argument or fight.
- a. Please explain. It was at a funeral in my fiancée's family. She tried to be nice to me, but I didn't want to hear it because of what she had said and done. I just walked away and ignored the fact that she was even there.
22. Do you believe that school leaders understand cyberbullying? No. I don't think that they relate to the experience online because it is not where they live their lives. If you aren't there enough to know about it, you can't understand what it is like.
- a. Can they do anything about it? In my case it was off campus. They will maybe talk to you and try to help you through, but unless both are students there, there is nothing that can be done.
  - b. Is it worth reporting? Not unless both sides are students and it is done on school property.
23. Do you believe that school leaders can help solve the problem? No. If they don't understand it, how can they?
24. Do you believe that law enforcement officers can help solve the problem? Not unless they say your name or make a specific threat directly to you. If they don't do that, they really can't do anything. If it is not a serious threat, they probably wouldn't understand how bad it is and think that they could be doing something more important.

25. Why did you agree to be a participant in this study? More needs to be known about this problem and you are trying to help. It really hurt me and hopefully people like you can make the problem more well known so that people can begin to do something about it.

**Dan: Individual Interview**

1. Tell me about yourself.

What is your age? 18

Which race or ethnicity do you most closely identify with? White

What are your career goals? Marines starting March 28<sup>th</sup>.

Describe the technology that you commonly use in your personal life? Cell Phone

2. What did you enjoy the most about high school? Friends and my senior year. 3. How would you describe yourself during your scholastic experience at Pineland High School? (School name is not really Pineland High...I only did this to maintain confidentiality within the appendix of the dissertation.)

How were your grades in high school? Average at best. I was behind a lot of the time.

Did you get in trouble in high school that resulted in In-School or Out-Of-School

Suspension? Yes

If yes, did you get in trouble that resulted in ISS or OSS in some years more than others? Which years did you have the most disciplinary problems? Most all of them were in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades

4. How did you feel about the teachers and administrators at your school? Liked some, didn't like others.

Were they demanding of you academically? A few of them were.

Do you think that they cared about you and your success? Some of them.

Did you trust them? Some of them, mostly 3 that I can think of.

5. Describe the frequency of your technology use in high school for each of the following prompts.

Cell Phones (Including Text Messaging) Yeah a lot.

Social Networking Even more. All the time.

Chat Rooms Not really, only when I was playing a game online if that counts.

Instant Messaging Never

Video Sharing Yes. I liked watching them more than posting.

Email No.

*Read and provide a copy of the cyberbullying definition of Parry Aftab at this point.*

Cyberbullying occurs “when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones”.

1. Describe your definition of cyberbullying. What you said seems to cover it all.
2. What grade(s) were you in when you were cyberbullied? All of them since middle school.
3. Did you know the bully(s) beforehand? Most of the time, but not one.
  - a. Did you know him/her offline? If yes, please elaborate. There were a lot. All but one were people that I knew, mostly exes.
  - b. Did you know them online? If yes, please elaborate. Only one. A girl, or at least she claimed to be, got really mad at me over me beating her at Risk on Pogo.
  - c. Where did you get to know them first? School or girls that I dated from towns near here.
  - d. How long did you know them? Different times. Some for years and some for months. There were too many to really give you a good time about how long I knew them. I'd say years mostly, but shorted with the exes.
  - e. Did you consider the cyberbully to be a friend of yours? Some of them were. They were the hardest to deal with.
4. What caused your cyberbullying victimization to start? Lots of things.



- a. Were there offline causes? If yes, please elaborate. Mostly dating. Cheating will really do it. Oh, and dating the sister of an ex will really do it. They really want to get you back, but I guess I deserve some of it for that (OC: Dan laughs audibly, so did I but he didn't hear it as I was not on speaker).
  - b. Were there online causes? If yes, please elaborate. Beating someone at a game can make them mad too I guess since I got cussed out for beating a girl at Risk on Pogo.
5. How many times were you cyberbullied? A lot. 50 or 60 different times maybe. That's just a guess.
- a. Over what period of time? Most lasted a few days, a few a couple of minutes. There were a few that lasted a few weeks. I finally got tired of it and just got away from it all for a while and I guess it died down after I left or defriended the person I was having trouble with. Defriending helps most of the time, unless you have to see them in person again.
6. Please explain how each method was used to cyberbully you online as I give you a prompt. If a method was not used to cyberbully you, just tell me.
- a. Cell Phone Yes. Facebook mostly. Oh, texts too.
  - b. Social Network Yes. Most of it was Facebook. MySpace once or twice, but it is dead now.
  - c. Instant Messaging No
  - d. Chat Room Only once.
  - e. Email No

- f. Video Sharing A couple of times when I did something embarrassing and someone recorded and posted it. Those are really bad.
  - g. Was any other method used that I did not mention? Please explain. I don't think so.
7. Did the cyberbullying lead to issues offline?
- a. Did it lead to an argument or physical confrontation of any sort? Please explain. I never fought, but I wanted to a few times. Arguments mostly. I did give my address to one guy and told him to meet me. I would have fought him when I saw him, but he never showed up.
  - b. Did you feel ostracized? Yes. Mostly from friends of my exes. They didn't want to have anything to do with me after things got put online by the exes.
  - c. Did you feel isolated? There were a few times when I locked myself in my room. It was my choice. I left the phone in the other room and just wanted to get away even though I knew it was still going on. It's hard to get away from it.
  - d. Did you have trouble getting along with others during your victimization?
  - e. Yeah. All the time. I hate people that talk too much online. I didn't want to be around or see any of them because I wanted to punch some of them.
8. Explain how the victimization made you feel.
- a. Were you depressed? A little I guess, but mostly mad.
  - b. Were you angry? Yes. I wanted to fight sometimes.
  - c. Were you frustrated? I wanted to say something, but I really didn't want to start anything in person.

9. Do you believe that people act differently online than they do offline? If yes, continue to prompts. Oh yeah.
- a. Do you think that having a hidden identity impacts their behavior online? They lie. Some hide behind fake names and make fake pages. One claimed to be someone she wasn't. She even put fake pictures online and all. It is easy to be brave when nobody knows who you are, but they are cowards in person.
  - b. Do you think that people say mean things online that they would not say offline? All the time. In person, they are afraid that they would get punched in the mouth. Online, they feel like you can't get to them or even find out who they really are.
  - c. Do the morals of people change when they are online? Some people say things and judge others. Some say racist stuff. They can get away with it online, but they can't in person.
10. Were you bullied in your in school years in ways other than cyberbullying? If yes, prompt. Yes.
- a. Was there a connection between the bullying and your cyberbullying victimization? No.
11. How would you say that cyberbullying compares to traditional bullying? It is way worse. People put it out there and it is public. Anybody can go on and see it and it just doesn't go away. Especially the videos. If you do something embarrassing or get beat up and it gets put on YouTube, people keep going back and looking at it and laughing. Just thinking about it is embarrassing.
12. Explain how you coped with the emotions related to cyberbullying.

- a. Who did you turn to? Nobody until the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade. I got close to one friend and started telling him. It helped. Before that, I just kept it bottled up inside me.
    - i. Why did you choose to turn to them? Trust.
  - b. Did you find any activities or pastimes that helped? Video games, shooting, and drinking.
  - c. What else seemed to help? That's about it. Anything to get your mind off of it. I did punch a few holes in my wall. I guess that helped too.
13. Please explain how your experience with cyberbullying victimization impacted your performance in school in each of the following areas.
- a. Distraction Couple of times, especially when I saw people or had class with them. I did check Facebook in class from time to time. When something bad was posted that I had not seen, that was really distracting.
  - b. Grades Yes. That's my excuse as a freshman. I think it did matter.
  - c. State Mandated Tests No.
  - d. Attendance Sometime I would act like I was sick just so I didn't have to deal with it.
  - e. Trouble resulting in discipline Yes. When I got into arguments at school because of it. It happened several times. They made me see the counselor about it too.
14. Did you tell anyone about your victimization? A few.
15. Please explain why you decided to tell or not to tell each of the following groups of individuals listed below (please input your answer beside the prompt).
- a. Friends Just one. Not until my junior year or so.

- b. Parents No. I thought they would make it worse because I tattled or see what I said back and cuss me out too. It would make it worse. They wouldn't understand.
  - c. Teachers Just 2, but only after it was over. I guess I just wanted to talk about it a little.
  - d. School administrators Only when I got in trouble. They wouldn't do nothing.
  - e. Counselors The principal made me talk to her once. I didn't want to and I didn't know or trust her like that. She tried to be comforting, but that didn't solve anything. I basically said anything I had to to get out of there.
  - f. Law enforcement officers No way. I don't want to be that guy. I avoid police. It makes you look bad to get them into anything.
  - g. Are there any other people that you told that did not fall into one of these groups?  
I don't think so.
16. What reaction did you receive from those you told about cyberbullying? Were you satisfied with their response? Not the adults. They just don't understand because they haven't been there. Well, the teachers didn't hurt anything, but it was already over by then. Having a good friend to turn to does help.
17. Did telling people about the cyberbullying stop the cyberbullying? No, but it helps you get over your problems.
- a. How did each individual or group that you told help or fail to help? Nobody really helped to end it. It was really just my problem.
18. Was it worth the effort to tell people? Not really.
- a. Do you wish you had told more people? No

- b. Do you wish you had not told some people? Some people, mostly the counselor and the principal. I should have kept it to myself.
19. Did you respond to the bully online after you were cyberbullied?
- c. If yes, how? I cussed them out on their pages or sent them texts, but I never did it first. Sometimes their boyfriends got involved and cussed me out and then I'd cuss them out too. All I did was respond though. I never started a new page or thread about them.
  - d. If no, what was the result? Sometime I just let it go. It ended quicker that way, but sometime you have to stand up for yourself.
20. Did you respond to the bully offline after you were cyberbullied? I had several arguments and almost fought a few times, but never did.
- a. If yes, how? I think I just answered that...sorry.
21. Did it result in any problems or feelings the next time that you met the cyberbully face to face? Yes
- a. Please explain. I would get mad, start shaking, and want to hit someone. I learned to just go somewhere to be by myself and calm down.
22. Do you believe that school leaders understand cyberbullying? Not at all. Unless they've been there, they don't understand it. They didn't have Facebook or anything when they were growing up and most are old and don't know much about it. They just can't understand until they've been there.
- a. Can they do anything about it? Not unless it happens at school and they really don't do anything about it then. They should try to.

- b. Is it worth reporting? No, because nothing will be done. They would get a real bully...you know what I am talking about, but Facebook bullying doesn't seem real to them.
23. Do you believe that school leaders can help solve the problem? No.
24. Do you believe that law enforcement officers can help solve the problem? Not at all.  
These cops around here can't even fix their bikes. Do you think they can understand online problems? No way.
25. Why did you agree to be a participant in this study? I trust you. You were good to me in school and you are trying to do something good here. I don't think that it will end it or anything, but if it helps, it seems like the right thing to do.

**Evan Individual Interview**

1. Tell me about yourself.

What is your age? 18

Which race or ethnicity do you most closely identify with? White

What are your career goals? I want to act...drama.

Describe the technology that you commonly use in your personal life? Cell Phone

2. What did you enjoy the most about high school? Drama classes.

3. How would you describe yourself during your scholastic experience at Pineland High School? (School name is not really Pineland High...I only did this to maintain confidentiality within the appendix of the dissertation.)

How were your grades in high school? A's and B's...good.

Did you get in trouble in high school that resulted in In-School or Out-Of-School Suspension? No.

If yes, did you get in trouble that resulted in ISS or OSS in some years more than others? Which years did you have the most disciplinary problems?

4. How did you feel about the teachers and administrators at your school? I liked most of them.

Were they demanding of you academically? Somewhat. Some were, some not so much.

Do you think that they cared about you and your success? Yes.

Did you trust them? Yes.

5. Describe the frequency of your technology use in high school for each of the following prompts.

Cell Phones (Including Text Messaging) A lot.

Social Networking Often.

Chat Rooms No.

Instant Messaging No.



Video Sharing Yes, but not much. I did share my music videos online.

Email Very little.

***Read and provide a copy of the cyberbullying definition of Parry Aftab at this point.***

Cyberbullying occurs “when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones”.

1. Describe your definition of cyberbullying. I like what that said. That is exactly what it is.
2. What grade(s) were you in when you were cyberbullied? 11<sup>th</sup> mostly, but 12<sup>th</sup> too.
3. Did you know the bully(s) beforehand? Yes, I know them in real life.
  - a. Did you know him/her offline? If yes, please elaborate. They went to school with me.
  - b. Did you know them online? If yes, please elaborate. Yes, but I knew them offline first.
  - c. Where did you get to know them first? Offline.
  - d. How long did you know them? 1 or 2 years.
  - e. Did you consider the cyberbully to be a friend of yours? Not really. I would say that they were an acquaintance.
4. What caused your cyberbullying victimization to start? The way I am. The way I act and carry myself.
  - a. Were there offline causes? If yes, please elaborate. I guess that they were offended or uncomfortable about the way that I act. I am outgoing and into drama. It was basically intolerance that started it all with me. They were calling me

names like gay and faggot just because of the way that I act every day. It was all rumors and people not liking people who are different than they are.

- b. Were there online causes? If yes, please elaborate. I guess my status updates and pictures that I posted on Facebook, but it wasn't about them in any way.
5. How many times were you cyberbullied? 3 that I can think of. Yeah, 3.
- a. Over what period of time? Each lasted a few days at most, but things stay out there longer than that. It kept going and was uncomfortable for a long time.
6. Please explain how each method was used to cyberbully you online as I give you a prompt. If a method was not used to cyberbully you, just tell me.
- a. Cell Phone No.
  - b. Social Network Yes. I used a computer at the time and they made some really mean comments on my status updates.
  - c. Instant Messaging No
  - d. Chat Room No.
  - e. Email No.
  - f. Video Sharing No.
  - g. Was any other method used that I did not mention? Please explain. No.
7. Did the cyberbullying lead to issues offline? Yes, emotionally.
- a. Did it lead to an argument or physical confrontation of any sort? Please explain.  
Not anything threatening, but I did talk to them in the counselor's office. She sat us down, I told them how I felt, and she said if it happened again that it would be addressed and it would be severe.

- b. Did you feel ostracized? Yes. I didn't do anything to them at all. I was really uncomfortable anytime that I was around them or anytime that they were in my sight. I just wanted to pretend that they weren't there, but I couldn't ignore them.
  - c. Did you feel isolated? Yes. Some of my friends were his friends. I was really uncomfortable around my friends when they were around him.
  - d. Did you have trouble getting along with others during your victimization? Only people who were around the person who was cyberbullying me.
8. Explain how the victimization made you feel.
- a. Were you depressed? No.
  - b. Were you angry? No.
  - c. Were you frustrated? Yes. I didn't do anything to them. They did it just because of the way I was acting and they criticized me for it with really mean messages on Facebook. I didn't do anything to offend them that I know of, I guess they just felt like messing with me because I am different and they don't understand me.
9. Do you believe that people act differently online than they do offline? If yes, continue to prompts. Yes.
- a. Do you think that having a hidden identity impacts their behavior online? They don't know who it is. They can make rude comments and there are real feelings involved, but you don't always know who it is. They can make up fake accounts and blame it on others. They just feel safe.
  - b. Do you think that people say mean things online that they would not say offline? Yes. You can't do anything but report it. In person, you can get it to the right people to get some help. Online, it just doesn't seem real to the adults that can

help. Once it starts, there is nothing you can do to stop it like you can in person where it is visible and principals think it is a real problem.

- c. Do the morals of people change when they are online? Yes. People can be who they want to be. I have seen people on Facebook that don't hardly talk in person and seem real shy say "F" this and "F" that on Facebook and really speak out in good and bad ways. You would never think they would be that way, but online it is like they are a different person.
10. Were you bullied in your in school years in ways other than cyberbullying? If yes, prompt. Yes.
- a. Was there a connection between the bullying and your cyberbullying victimization? Yes, there was a connection with they intolerance over the way I am.
11. How would you say that cyberbullying compares to traditional bullying? Both are really bad. Traditional bullying is just so embarrassing. The bully gets the reaction that they want there and there are people who see it and it is really embarrassing. Online, the worst part is the visibility. It doesn't just go away and everyone can see it. People come up and ask you about it and it just keeps going. I really can't say that one is really worse than the other.
12. Explain how you coped with the emotions related to cyberbullying.
- a. Who did you turn to? My best friend mostly.
    - ii. Why did you choose to turn to them? I know that I can trust them.
  - b. Did you find any activities or pastimes that helped? Drama and songwriting.
  - c. What else seemed to help? Nothing really.

13. Please explain how your experience with cyberbullying victimization impacted your performance in school in each of the following areas.

- a. Distraction Only at lunch. They were there, so it was uncomfortable for me to be there.
- b. Grades No.
- c. State Mandated Tests No.
- d. Attendance No.
- e. Trouble resulting in discipline No.

14. Did you tell anyone about your victimization? Yes, my best friend. Other people read it online and came to me about it.

15. Please explain why you decided to tell or not to tell each of the following groups of individuals listed below (please input your answer beside the prompt).

- a. Friends I talked to some of them. I talked to my good friends about it...the ones I can trust. Some others came to me and I just told them it was OK. If you tell the wrong person, it can make it worse. It happened to me with one person.
- b. Parents No. They knew, but I didn't really want to talk to them about it. My friends understood better.
- c. Teachers No, I just didn't care to tell them. They had other things to worry about.
- d. School administrators No. I went to them with a similar problem and they didn't do anything to help. I didn't trust them after that, especially something online that they wouldn't think was a big deal.

- e. Counselors Yes. I wanted to talk to someone about it that could talk to us both and solve the problem. It didn't help much, but it didn't get any worse, so I guess that helped.
  - f. Law enforcement officers No. I didn't want to take it to them.
  - g. Are there any other people that you told that did not fall into one of these groups?  
No.
16. What reaction did you receive from those you told about cyberbullying? Were you satisfied with their response? They talked to me. I was able to vent to them about how I was feeling. I was happy that so many people came to see if I was OK.
17. Did telling people about the cyberbullying stop the cyberbullying? No. Some may have helped and some made it worse, but it continued til it just ran itself out.
- a. How did each individual or group that you told help or fail to help? I vented to my friends, especially my best friend. It was good to have people to listen and talk to, but one of them made it worse. They took it to the other person and told them what I was saying. My friend took their side and it made it worse for a while. Talking to the counselor may have helped, but it didn't stop. It was not as bad and easier to deal with after that.
18. Was it worth the effort to tell people? Yes, for the most part.
- a. Do you wish you had told more people? No.
  - b. Do you wish you had not told some people? The one person that went and told the person what I was saying and took their side.
19. Did you respond to the bully online after you were cyberbullied? No.
- a. If yes, how?

- b. If no, what was the result? I was afraid that if I fought back that it would keep going longer and get worse. I decided that the best thing that I could do was ignore it.
20. Did you respond to the bully offline after you were cyberbullied? Yes.
- a. If yes, how? I talked to the counselor and had her call them in. I wanted to talk to them with an adult present instead of without an adult around.
21. Did it result in any problems or feelings the next time that you met the cyberbully face to face? Yes. I was very uncomfortable anytime that the person was around.
- a. Please explain. It was just uncomfortability. Frustrating and uncomfortable. That is the best I can describe it.
22. Do you believe that school leaders understand cyberbullying? No. I think that they really don't think that some people can be so mean online. They know the student in person and think they know them, but they act like a different person online. I don't think that they understand that or how real online things are in our lives. If it is something they can see, it is more real to them than something in cyberspace. It just seems distant to them and unimportant.
- a. Can they do anything about it? Yes, if it is really bad like death threats or something. Other than that, I don't think that would do anything.
- b. Is it worth reporting? Yes. I think so because they need to be aware of what is going on if it is really bad.
23. Do you believe that school leaders can help solve the problem? Yes, if it is really bad and happen on campus. If it is off campus and they keep it on Facebook, there is not a thing that they can do to stop it.

24. Do you believe that law enforcement officers can help solve the problem? No. We have had situations like that where I work. They come in and threaten things, but nothing ever happened. They think that they have bigger problems, but it is because they don't really understand how big of a deal it is either.
25. Why did you agree to be a participant in this study? I want more people to understand what it was like so that they can be aware of it and understand it better.



### Haley Individual Interview

1. Tell me about yourself.

What is your age? 19

Which race or ethnicity do you most closely identify with? African-American

What are your career goals? Dental Hygienist

Describe the technology that you commonly use in your personal life? Computer, Cell Phone

Mostly

2. What did you enjoy the most about high school? Friends

3. How would you describe yourself during your scholastic experience at Pineland High School? (School name is not really Pineland High...I only did this to maintain confidentiality within the appendix of the dissertation.)

How were your grades in high school? So-So I guess. I graduated.

Did you get in trouble in high school that resulted in In-School or Out-Of-School

Suspension? No.

If yes, did you get in trouble that resulted in ISS or OSS in some years more than others? Which years did you have the most disciplinary problems? No.

4. How did you feel about the teachers and administrators at your school?

Were they demanding of you academically? Maybe. Some were.

Do you think that they cared about you and your success? Yes. Definitely.

Did you trust them? Yes.

5. Describe the frequency of your technology use in high school for each of the following prompts.

Cell Phones (Including Text Messaging) All the time.

Social Networking All the time. Its on my cell, so I was always on there, even in class.

Chat Rooms Never

Instant Messaging Never

Video Sharing No. I didn't, but it was done to me.

Email No.

***Read and provide a copy of the cyberbullying definition of Parry Aftab at this point.***

Cyberbullying occurs “when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones”.

1. Describe your definition of cyberbullying. It sounds good to me.
2. What grade(s) were you in when you were cyberbullied? 9-12.
3. Did you know the bully(s) beforehand? Sometimes.
  - a. Did you know him/her offline? If yes, please elaborate. Most all of them. They were friends or people that I knew through friends. Some were ex-boyfriends.
  - b. Did you know them online? If yes, please elaborate. There were some I didn't know. It started with stuff about my friends that they knew. It went over to me when I took up for my friends and said they shouldn't be saying things about them. I still don't know them personally.
  - c. Where did you get to know them first? Some I didn't know, but most I knew from my daily life.
  - d. How long did you know them? Some minutes, some years. Most I'd say a long time.

- e. Did you consider the cyberbully to be a friend of yours? Some of them were, but not after that.
4. What caused your cyberbullying victimization to start? Jealousy mostly. Rumors too.  
You have something they want and they can't have it so they talk about you. It is mostly drama over dating and stuff.
  - a. Were there offline causes? If yes, please elaborate. Yes. Mostly over breakups.
  - b. Were there online causes? If yes, please elaborate. Yes. When I took up for my friends it came back on me.
5. How many times were you cyberbullied? Maybe 20 or so.
  - a. Over what period of time? All the time in high school. Mostly in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades.
6. Please explain how each method was used to cyberbully you online as I give you a prompt. If a method was not used to cyberbully you, just tell me.
  - a. Cell Phone Yes. Texts and Facebook.
  - b. Social Network Facebook. That's where everything goes on because it is so popular. Everyone has one. People get mad if you're in their business, but they put it out there for everyone to see.
  - c. Instant Messaging No
  - d. Chat Room No
  - e. Email No
  - f. Video Sharing I was told that it was. Some people took an embarrassing video of me and said they put it on YouTube. I never saw it. I didn't want to. People asked

me about it, so I guess they did or at least showed it to people. I still don't know what happened to it and really don't want to.

- g. Was any other method used that I did not mention? Please explain. No.
7. Did the cyberbullying lead to issues offline? Yes
- a. Did it lead to an argument or physical confrontation of any sort? Please explain. I had several arguments. It never was a fist fight or anything, but an argument. It was mostly arguing on Facebook most times.
  - b. Did you feel ostracized? Not really, but there are people I still don't have anything to say to.
  - c. Did you feel isolated? Yes, at times. It hurts and sometimes you feel alone. Sometime you just want to be alone and away from it all.
  - d. Did you have trouble getting along with others during your victimization? Not other people. Just the ones who started stuff.
8. Explain how the victimization made you feel. It made me feel lots of things.
- a. Were you depressed? No. I'm not the kind of person to let things keep me down.
  - b. Were you angry? Yes. I got mad about things that were said about me and my friends/
  - c. Were you frustrated? Yes, when I did not know the people messing with me. Who are they to mess with me when I don't even know them. It was frustrating.
9. Do you believe that people act differently online than they do offline? If yes, continue to prompts.
- a. Do you think that having a hidden identity impacts their behavior online? Yes, because you don't know who they are. Everyone has pictures up, but how do you

know it is that person? People fake things all the time and I have had it happen to me where it wasn't who I thought it was.

- b. Do you think that people say mean things online that they would not say offline?

Yes. They are scared to say it to your face. They say things behind a computer because you can't do anything about it.

- c. Do the morals of people change when they are online?

Yes. They try to be somebody they're not. They say things they shouldn't or wouldn't in real life. They can be more mean because they feel safe and like nobody can do anything to them.

10. Were you bullied in your in school years in ways other than cyberbullying? If yes, prompt. Yes

- a. Was there a connection between the bullying and your cyberbullying victimization? Not at all.

11. How would you say that cyberbullying compares to traditional bullying? It is hard to say.

They both hurt so much. Traditional you can feel like you might get beat up, but it is more mental online and it is there for everyone to see.

12. Explain how you coped with the emotions related to cyberbullying.

- a. Who did you turn to? Friends

iii. Why did you choose to turn to them? Trust

- b. Did you find any activities or pastimes that helped? Not really. Being with my friends.

- c. What else seemed to help? Nothing really

13. Please explain how your experience with cyberbullying victimization impacted your performance in school in each of the following areas.

- a. Distraction Yes. I can easily get distracted with things going on.
- b. Grades Yes. If I was distracted, I didn't do so good with my work or tests.
- c. State Mandated Tests Yes. I think so because stuff was going on around the time of the grad test. It was on my mind and I didn't pass them all.
- d. Attendance No. I liked being at school.
- e. Trouble resulting in discipline No.

14. Did you tell anyone about your victimization? Friends

15. Please explain why you decided to tell or not to tell each of the following groups of individuals listed below (please input your answer beside the prompt).

- a. Friends I trust them and needed some people to talk to and listen and support me.
- b. Parents No. I don't want them in my business. It would make it worse.
- c. Teachers No. If I didn't tell my parents, I wouldn't tell them. It could make it a whole big mess.
- d. School administrators No. Didn't want them in my business.
- e. Counselors Same. Didn't want her in my business.
- f. Law enforcement officers No way. You don't want to get them in it unless you have to, and it didn't get that far. I really didn't want to make it that big of a deal.
- g. Are there any other people that you told that did not fall into one of these groups?  
No.

16. What reaction did you receive from those you told about cyberbullying? Were you satisfied with their response? Support. Yes.

17. Did telling people about the cyberbullying stop the cyberbullying? It sort of stopped on its own.
- a. How did each individual or group that you told help or fail to help? Friends were great to talk to. They listened and stood up for me too.
18. Was it worth the effort to tell people? Yes.
- a. Do you wish you had told more people? No.
  - b. Do you wish you had not told some people? No.
19. Did you respond to the bully online after you were cyberbullied?
- a. If yes, how? I argued back, on Facebook mostly. I had to take up for my friend and myself. There was some name calling and words on both sides, but I wasn't the one who started any of it.
  - b. If no, what was the result?
20. Did you respond to the bully offline after you were cyberbullied?
- a. If yes, how? I had some arguments to stand up for myself, but nothing else happened.
21. Did it result in any problems or feelings the next time that you met the cyberbully face to face? Nervous and mad once or twice.
- a. Please explain. Mostly, I just let it go and they didn't say anything either. I had just rather avoid it all if I could, I guess they did too.
22. Do you believe that school leaders understand cyberbullying? Probably not. No. I don't think so.
- a. Can they do anything about it? Maybe, if it is bad and at school or something. Not if it happens away from school.

- b. Is it worth reporting? Yes, if it is really bad. Anything is worth a try.
23. Do you believe that school leaders can help solve the problem? No. They really don't understand it. Nobody can until it happens to them. They may think they do, but they really don't. They really don't understand how big things are online and how everyone sees it and how embarrassing it is.
24. Do you believe that law enforcement officers can help solve the problem? No. They really don't understand how things are online either. They probably think they have more real problems to deal with anyway than something online.
25. Why did you agree to be a participant in this study? To tell you how it really is, how it hurts, and how people need to stop it.



**Jack Individual Interview**

1. Tell me about yourself.

What is your age? 18

Which race or ethnicity do you most closely identify with? Native American, Muskogee mostly but have Lakota in me too.

What are your career goals? Auto Mechanic

Describe the technology that you commonly use in your personal life? Computer, Cell

2. What did you enjoy the most about high school? Teachers who actually took their job seriously.

3. How would you describe yourself during your scholastic experience at Pineland High School? (School name is not really Pineland High...I only did this to maintain confidentiality within the appendix of the dissertation.)

How were your grades in high school? Lower than they could have been.

Did you get in trouble in high school that resulted in In-School or Out-Of-School

Suspension? Yes. Several times

If yes, did you get in trouble that resulted in ISS or OSS in some years more than others? Which years did you have the most disciplinary problems? Mostly 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>,

4. How did you feel about the teachers and administrators at your school? I liked some of them.

Were they demanding of you academically? A few.

Do you think that they cared about you and your success? A few.

Did you trust them? A few.

5. Describe the frequency of your technology use in high school for each of the following prompts.

Cell Phones (Including Text Messaging) Sometimes, I guess a lot if you count texting.

Social Networking Most of the time.

Chat Rooms Never

Instant Messaging Through Facebook messaging.

Video Sharing A good bit.

Email Oh yeah.

***Read and provide a copy of the cyberbullying definition of Parry Aftab at this point.***

Cyberbullying occurs “when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones”.

1. Describe your definition of cyberbullying. My definition is pretty much the same. I guess that’s good by me.
2. What grade(s) were you in when you were cyberbullied? Mostly 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>.
3. Did you know the bully(s) beforehand?
  - a. Did you know him/her offline? If yes, please elaborate. Most all of them went to school with me since I moved in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I considered some friends.
  - b. Did you know them online? If yes, please elaborate. One girl. If didn’t know who she was at all, but I guess she knew me.
  - c. Where did you get to know them first? School. All but one.
  - d. How long did you know them? Years except for the one.
  - e. Did you consider the cyberbully to be a friend of yours? Actually, yes... before. I do not consider them a friend at all now.
4. What caused your cyberbullying victimization to start? Different things.
  - a. Were there offline causes? If yes, please elaborate. With the girl I didn’t know. Apparently, I saw her before...or so she said. I didn’t even know her. I have been told that she likes to date older guys and she started to say things about me. I have

no idea why because I never talked to her, much less mess with her. She was spreading rumors and it was just gossip.

- b. Were there online causes? If yes, please elaborate. With the others, it was stuff they said online. Some are just intolerant of others and I am different and proud of it. One was because he did not respect my religious beliefs because I am not a Christian that believes every word of the Bible to be true. The others were just about rumors and gossip online.
5. How many times were you cyberbullied? 3 good times, but there were a lot of little things as well.
  - a. Over what period of time? Of the big 3, 2 lasted a week or so and one went for a month or two I'd say.
6. Please explain how each method was used to cyberbully you online as I give you a prompt. If a method was not used to cyberbully you, just tell me.
  - a. Cell Phone Yes, if you count texts. It involved texts to friends and to me.
  - b. Social Network Yes, Facebook. There are 3 types of people on Facebook: people who find it useful, people who like to keep up with friends, and people who just love the attention and love to start drama.
  - c. Instant Messaging No
  - d. Chat Room No
  - e. Email No
  - f. Video Sharing No
  - g. Was any other method used that I did not mention? Please explain. No
7. Did the cyberbullying lead to issues offline? Twice

- a. Did it lead to an argument or physical confrontation of any sort? Please explain.  
Yes. I had to talk to two of the people involved in order to stop it. I had to stand up for myself and stop it. It was an argument with threats to punch each other and stuff, but nothing more.
  - b. Did you feel ostracized? Not really, but I did lose some so-called friends.
  - c. Did you feel isolated? A couple of times. It is like if someone picks a fight with you on their land, you can't bring your friends. You are in their territory and it is there all the time so you really can't get away from it. It does sort of make you feel isolated when everyone seems to be against you.
  - d. Did you have trouble getting along with others during your victimization? Not really. I just had to laugh it off. I couldn't let it ruin my true friendships, but I didn't want to see those people.
8. Explain how the victimization made you feel.
- a. Were you depressed? No, never. You can't let those people drag you down.
  - b. Were you angry? Yes, once especially. It was over a misunderstanding with school and education. The guy picked on my education, the classes I took, and where I went to school because he didn't go here. He didn't know what it was like and I tried to explain that I wasn't stupid. He just wouldn't accept the truth and kept picking. The sad thing is that the guy could not type or spell, but I never picked back. I just wanted him to admit that my education was good.
  - c. Were you frustrated? Yes. Especially when the guy would not admit that I got a good education here. He just refused to listen and kept going on. It was really

frustrating because I couldn't do anything about his postings and he refused to see the simple truth or to admit that I was intelligent.

9. Do you believe that people act differently online than they do offline? If yes, continue to prompts. Yes. Without a doubt.

a. Do you think that having a hidden identity impacts their behavior online? Of course. It is their shield. It is like the can make their profile their mask and they feel like it protects them to do or say whatever. They feel like since nobody knows who they are that they could say pretty much anything because nobody will correct them.

b. Do you think that people say mean things online that they would not say offline? Oh yes! They would never say those things to my face because I am an Indian and I carry a big knife. You know I'm playing, but I would definitely do something if it were in person. My first thought is to hit them, but I can't through a computer. It would be different in person.

c. Do the morals of people change when they are online? Yes, very much so. The funny thing is most call themselves Christians and go to fundamentalist churches. I thought that as Christians, they would follow the direction of Jesus and be kind. They act kind in real life, but it is like they change personalities when nobody is watching them or knows who they are.

10. Were you bullied in your in school years in ways other than cyberbullying? If yes, prompt. Oh God, Yes. Middle school and the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

a. Was there a connection between the bullying and your cyberbullying victimization? Not at all. Different people and different times.

11. How would you say that cyberbullying compares to traditional bullying? I would Say that online is way worse. Really, they couldn't get away with it physically or verbally doing it in person, so they hide online. Online, they say whatever they want to and it just keeps going. Once it is there, it is there and it stays for everyone to stay.
12. Explain how you coped with the emotions related to cyberbullying. Just talking and being by myself.
- a. Who did you turn to? Friends and family.
    - iv. Why did you choose to turn to them? A few friends had seen some of it already on Facebook and asked about it. The others, I just needed to vent.
  - b. Did you find any activities or pastimes that helped? Not really, just getting away was good. I am involved in Muskogee dancing and crafts, so I guess that helped.
  - c. What else seemed to help? Nothing really that I can think of.
13. Please explain how your experience with cyberbullying victimization impacted your performance in school in each of the following areas.
- a. Distraction Not really. Well, it was uncomfortable if I saw the person at times.
  - b. Grades No.
  - c. State Mandated Tests No.
  - d. Attendance No
  - e. Trouble resulting in discipline No.
14. Did you tell anyone about your victimization? Yes. Friends and family.
15. Please explain why you decided to tell or not to tell each of the following groups of individuals listed below (please input your answer beside the prompt).

- a. Friends It is a good vent. I told the ones that I could trust, but not some of them with big mouths. I just wanted someone that could relate and understand me to talk to.
  - b. Parents Yes. It is good for them to know and talk to as well. They are good at giving advice and I trust them.
  - c. Teachers No. I just didn't think that they could do much and it really wasn't their problem to deal with those problems.
  - d. School administrators No way. I don't trust them enough and they didn't like me. If anything they would have called us in to talk to us and would probably have made it worse or keep going longer.
  - e. Counselors Never. She gossips like a teenage girl. It would have definitely made it worse because everyone in the office would have known about it, even the students.
  - f. Law enforcement officers (Long pause before a laugh and clap function). That would be the last place I would go. They really don't like me and I don't like or trust them. They couldn't make it better and it would most likely be a disaster.
  - g. Are there any other people that you told that did not fall into one of these groups?  
Naa.
16. What reaction did you receive from those you told about cyberbullying? Favorable Were you satisfied with their response? They were on my side and they helped most of the time in dealing with it all.

17. Did telling people about the cyberbullying stop the cyberbullying? Not at all. Once I contacted the parents of the girl that I did not know to tell them what was going on. I guess that worked. The other 2 ran their course in time.
- a. How did each individual or group that you told help or fail to help? The ones I told simply let me talk and vent.
18. Was it worth the effort to tell people? It didn't hurt anything.
- a. Do you wish you had told more people? Not really. You never know what would have made it worse.
  - b. Do you wish you had not told some people? No.
19. Did you respond to the bully online after you were cyberbullied? Yes.
- a. If yes, how? I did fight back online, but not by being aggressive. I calmly laid out the facts and stated my case. I guess I did get a little mean with the girl and picked back at her in a sarcastic way, but I never cussed anybody out or anything.
  - b. If no, what was the result?
20. Did you respond to the bully offline after you were cyberbullied? Yes.
- a. If yes, how? I had an argument. Some things were said and I let my feelings be known, but that was it. They weren't nearly as brave in person.
21. Did it result in any problems or feelings the next time that you met the cyberbully face to face? Yes.
- a. Please explain. It certainly did change things. It is like they have a shotgun online and they are always ready to fire. In person, they may have the shotgun, but they are afraid to break it out. It is easier to be brave online.



22. Do you believe that school leaders understand cyberbullying? Oh, no! They don't see it as a real place and they don't understand how it carries over back and forth online and in real life. They think they do because they read the news, but they can't until they have been through it. Since they aren't participants, they are outsiders. Outsiders can never fully understand until they really learn to listen to people who have been there without judging them.
- a. Can they do anything about it? No. For them, it is like a faucet leaking into a yard. They can stand at the fence and soak it up with towels, but they cannot stop the leak. If it is at school, maybe they can control it there, but they can't stop Facebook.
  - b. Is it worth reporting? Oh, No! Not to them. They don't understand and they can't do anything anyway off campus. They are too incompetent to do anything online. They can handle real life problems, but not online stuff.
23. Do you believe that school leaders can help solve the problem? No. Not until they learn more about it and more laws are passed to protect people off school.
24. Do you believe that law enforcement officers can help solve the problem? There is really nothing they can do either, even if they did understand. I am sure they don't so that is not really worth even talking about.
25. Why did you agree to be a participant in this study? I think that it is good to talk. I have learned that talking can help people from the Muskogee. I like to talk about problems in the world today, especially those that I have dealt with. If I can help people understand the problem, that would be really good.

**Lita Individual Interview**

1. Tell me about yourself.

What is your age? 18

Which race or ethnicity do you most closely identify with? White

What are your career goals? To be an English teacher

Describe the technology that you commonly use in your personal life? iPad and Cell Phone  
mostly

2. What did you enjoy the most about high school? Teachers

3. How would you describe yourself during your scholastic experience at Pineland High School?

Confident and friendly

How were your grades in high school? Amazing

Did you get in trouble in high school that resulted in In-School or Out-Of-School

Suspension? No

If yes, did you get in trouble that resulted in ISS or OSS in some years more than others? Which  
years did you have the most disciplinary problems? None

4. How did you feel about the teachers and administrators at your school? Loved most of them

Were they demanding of you academically? Very

Do you think that they cared about you and your success? yes

Did you trust them? yes

5. Describe the frequency of your technology use in high school for each of the following prompts.

Cell Phones (Including Text Messaging) A whole lot

Social Networking Even more

Chat Rooms Not a lot

Instant Messaging Minimal

Video Sharing Minimal

Email Some

*Read and provide a copy of the cyberbullying definition of Parry Aftab at this point.*

Cyberbullying occurs “when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones”.

1. Describe your definition of cyberbullying. I would agree, but it doesn't have to be a child or teen. Adults can do it too.
2. What grade(s) were you in when you were cyberbullied? 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>
3. Did you know the bully(s) beforehand? 9<sup>th</sup> yes, 12<sup>th</sup>, no
  - a. Did you know him/her offline? If yes, please elaborate. In the 9<sup>th</sup> not at first, but later. I knew that she was having some problems with my best friend.
  - b. Did you know them online? If yes, please elaborate. Online only, but my friend knew her personally, they had a problem, so she cyberbullied me on MySpace too because I was friends with the girl she was mad at. I got to know her online when she was having problems with my friend on her page and then when she started saying things about me on my page.
  - c. Where did you get to know them first? Online, but I knew of her before.
  - d. How long did you know them? Not at all until then.
  - e. Did you consider the cyberbully to be a friend of yours? Not at all. I wouldn't consider her anything personally connected with me.

4. What caused your cyberbullying victimization to start? My friend and her had a problem with the first one (O.C.: she was speaking of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade incident), the second said I was trying to take her man, but I didn't even know her or if it was someone playing games to bully me that I did know. I have wondered about that a lot since then.
  - a. Were there offline causes? If yes, please elaborate. My friend and her had a problem with the first one and she knew we were friends. I don't know on the second.
  - b. Were there online causes? If yes, please elaborate. No on either.
5. How many times were you cyberbullied? 2
  - a. Over what period of time? First, a week or two maybe. The second was only once, but it was the worst and most scary of the two.
6. Please explain how each method was used to cyberbully you online as I give you a prompt. If a method was not used to cyberbully you, just tell me.
  - a. Cell Phone Yes. She called and texted me calling me a whore and home wrecker on the 12<sup>th</sup> grade one.
  - b. Social Network The first one. She was calling me names and told me that she would beat my ass when she found me over the weekend.
  - c. Instant Messaging No
  - d. Chat Room No
  - e. Email No
  - f. Video Sharing No
  - g. Was any other method used that I did not mention? Please explain. No
7. Did the cyberbullying lead to issues offline? Maybe, what issues do you mean?

- a. Did it lead to an argument or physical confrontation of any sort? Please explain. I thought the 9<sup>th</sup> grade one would, but she didn't want any of this. She was all talk behind a computer screen.
  - b. Did you feel ostracized? No.
  - c. Did you feel isolated? No.
  - d. Did you have trouble getting along with others during your victimization? No.
8. Explain how the victimization made you feel.
- a. Were you depressed? It hurts. Words always do, especially if your self esteem is not really high at the time. It takes a while to get over. I mean, she couldn't see what her words were doing to me. The second time, no. I was just really mad and aggravated. It was worst with the first one because I knew who she was. When you don't know who they are, it is hard to know or describe exactly how to feel.
  - b. Were you angry? Very, both times. I was ready to fight if she said something the first time because I knew who she was. I thought we would, but she never came at me like that. The second time, I was angry, but I had no idea who was behind it.
  - c. Were you frustrated? A whole lot, especially the second time. I wondered if it was someone I knew that was trying to mess with me pretending to be somebody else. That could have been it and I still get frustrated thinking about it. I mean, I just couldn't figure out who to be mad at because I couldn't put a face with it.
9. Do you believe that people act differently online than they do offline? If yes, continue to prompts. Definitely.
- a. Do you think that having a hidden identity impacts their behavior online? Oh yeah! (Mad symbol inserted in text online) They seem safe, so they say whatever

they want because they feel like they can get away with it and nothing can be done. There is no way to prove it, so they can say whatever they want and you don't even know who it is attacking you. I just wish they could look at me when they say it so that they could see the emotion and the hurt they cause. They would never say those things face to face.

- b. Do you think that people say mean things online that they would not say offline?  
All the time.
  - c. Do the morals of people change when they are online? Very quickly. And all the time. They don't have to look at you and the hurt it causes when they talk online. They feel invincible, like no one can touch them or punish them. They are cowards, but they get away with it way too much.
10. Were you bullied in your in school years in ways other than cyberbullying? If yes, prompt. Yes, in middle school.
- a. Was there a connection between the bullying and your cyberbullying victimization? No.
11. How would you say that cyberbullying compares to traditional bullying? It has the same impact, but it is worse because you can't just go home and get away. It follows you because cell phones and Facebook are always there. MySpace is gone now, but the same thing is still there with Facebook. The 9<sup>th</sup> grade one...It is not like you can do anything about it. They have all of the control and they put it out there for everyone to see and to embarrass you in front of anybody who looks at it. It is not like a small crowd around a fight...it just stays there and you wonder how many people are reading bad things about you.

12. Explain how you coped with the emotions related to cyberbullying.
- a. Who did you turn to? Friends and family.
    - v. Why did you choose to turn to them? I trust them.
  - b. Did you find any activities or pastimes that helped? Not really, besides just hanging out with my friends and family.
  - c. What else seemed to help? Talking about it...just ranting to get it off my chest
13. Please explain how your experience with cyberbullying victimization impacted your performance in school in each of the following areas.
- a. Distraction No
  - b. Grades No
  - c. State Mandated Tests No
  - d. Attendance No
  - e. Trouble resulting in discipline No
14. Did you tell anyone about your victimization? Yes
15. Please explain why you decided to tell or not to tell each of the following groups of individuals listed below (please input your answer beside the prompt).
- a. Friends Yes. Some were there both times. They said they had my back and they supported me. They wanted to get involved, fight back, and tell them what they thought of them, but I didn't want to make it worse. I just wanted it to go away and just have them to talk to about it all.
  - b. Parents I didn't tell them the first time because I was younger, I didn't want to tattle, and I wanted to go places I was scared that Mama wouldn't let me go if she

knew that I may get into a fight. The second time, I let my Dad handle the situation because it was way scarier.

- c. Teachers I just told you that something happened to me in a random conversation.
- d. School administrators No
- e. Counselors No
- f. Law enforcement officers No
- g. Are there any other people that you told that did not fall into one of these groups?  
My little brother the second time. He went to get my Dad because the person was really threatening to harm me and I was scared.

16. What reaction did you receive from those you told about cyberbullying? Were you satisfied with their response? Yes, completely.

17. Did telling people about the cyberbullying stop the cyberbullying?

- a. How did each individual or group that you told help or fail to help? My friends supported me through both times. They were there to hear me rant and encourage me to feel strongly about myself. I just talked to them and they listened. That was all I really wanted, and they were around when I saw her next so I felt safe. My dad got on the phone the second time and it stopped after that.

18. Was it worth the effort to tell people? Yes

- a. Do you wish you had told more people? No, that did the trick.
- b. Do you wish you had not told some people? No. They all helped me through it in their own way.

19. Did you respond to the bully online after you were cyberbullied?



- a. If yes, how? Neither time. I am not going to become what they are.
  - b. If no, what was the result?
20. Did you respond to the bully offline after you were cyberbullied?
- a. If yes, how? I saw the girl the first time, but she didn't want to fight. We just looked at each other from a distance and neither said a thing. She rolled her eyes or something, but I didn't care. The second is more troublesome because I don't know if I have ever even seen the second person or if I ever will. I may have already. It has ended, so I guess it is all OK.
21. Did it result in any problems or feelings the next time that you met the cyberbully face to face?
- a. Please explain. I was nervous and ready to fight if she said anything, but she didn't and left pretty soon after I saw her with her friends. I didn't want to fight, so I was glad. I guess I was a little scared, nervous, and mad enough to fight if it had come to that.
22. Do you believe that school leaders understand cyberbullying? I think they want to and are realizing that it is a problem, but they don't know what it is like. It is not real to them. Until you're there, you just don't know what it is like.
- a. Can they do anything about it? Don't just say that because it is on Facebook somewhere off campus, we can't do anything about it. They need to make a stricter policy that covers the students all the time.
  - b. Is it worth reporting? Yes.
23. Do you believe that school leaders can help solve the problem? Not by themselves. Everyone needs to stand together and students need to get past the idea that telling an

adult is tattling and something to be ashamed of. But I am not sure that they won't make it worse sometimes by just talking and making the problem worse that it already was and not punishing the bully. Sometime school leaders talk too much when they should be willing to punish them for the harm they cause.

24. Do you believe that law enforcement officers can help solve the problem? If people tell them, but nobody wants to be seen bringing the police into the problem.

25. Why did you agree to be a participant in this study? It needs to be stopped. I want to help stop it in some way, and maybe speaking out is the way. People need to understand that it is not your fault. All of the names like bitch and home wrecker that I was called, it hurts...bad. And I did not do anything to anybody. I don't deserve to feel like that. Not everyone has the support and friends that I do. If it hurt me, it can hurt others worse. It needs to stop.

**Sandy Individual Interview**

1. Tell me about yourself.

What is your age? 19

Which race or ethnicity do you most closely identify with? White

What are your career goals? Medicine

Describe the technology that you commonly use in your personal life? Computer, Cell Phone

2. What did you enjoy the most about high school? My AP classes. They challenged me.

3. How would you describe yourself during your scholastic experience at Pineland High School? (School name is not really Pineland High...I only did this to maintain confidentiality within the appendix of the dissertation.)

How were your grades in high school? Good

Did you get in trouble in high school that resulted in In-School or Out-Of-School

Suspension? No

If yes, did you get in trouble that resulted in ISS or OSS in some years more than others? Which years did you have the most disciplinary problems?

4. How did you feel about the teachers and administrators at your school? Some were cool, some evil.

Were they demanding of you academically? Not really, but some were.

Do you think that they cared about you and your success? Yes

Did you trust them? Yes

5. Describe the frequency of your technology use in high school for each of the following prompts.

Cell Phones (Including Text Messaging) Lots

Social Networking Not too often

Chat Rooms Occasionally.

Instant Messaging Sometimes, if Skype counts

Video Sharing No

Email Often

*Read and provide a copy of the cyberbullying definition of Parry Aftab at this point.*

Cyberbullying occurs “when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones”.

1. Describe your definition of cyberbullying. It is blunt, but good. I like blunt and to the point.
2. What grade(s) were you in when you were cyberbullied? 12th
3. Did you know the bully(s) beforehand? Most of the time
  - a. Did you know him/her offline? If yes, please elaborate. Yes, most of them. Some were friends and others I just knew.
  - b. Did you know them online? If yes, please elaborate. Some. Most were people that I didn't know that said intolerant things. Some were Anti-Semitic which I take personally because my boyfriend is Jewish. Others were people who said homophobic things and many of my friends live an alternative sexual lifestyle.
  - c. Where did you get to know them first? IRL (typed)
  - d. How long did you know them? Some not at all, some for years
  - e. Did you consider the cyberbully to be a friend of yours? Some of them were, but not afterward
4. What caused your cyberbullying victimization to start? Different things.

- a. Were there offline causes? If yes, please elaborate. One or two. I remember one that was saying Anti-Semitic things online. Intolerance is the biggest problem and one was a Neo-Nazi. Some were things about my friends who are gay. They knew it offline and took it online to say things about them and their lifestyle.
  - b. Were there online causes? If yes, please elaborate. Trolling. I put some sarcastic twists on things just joking around and some people took it the wrong way.
5. How many times were you cyberbullied? 5
- a. Over what period of time? Some lasted a day or two, some an hour or so.
6. Please explain how each method was used to cyberbully you online as I give you a prompt. If a method was not used to cyberbully you, just tell me.
- a. Cell Phone No.
  - b. Social Network Once. Anti-Semitism on Facebook by someone who claimed to be a Neo-Nazi. I defended my boyfriend and got called a Jewish bitch. I am not even Jewish, but it still came back to me.
  - c. Instant Messaging No
  - d. Chat Room Once. I was trolling with some words sarcastically against homophobia. Some people took it wrong.
  - e. Email No
  - f. Video Sharing No
  - g. Was any other method used that I did not mention? Please explain. I did get into an argument with a girl on an MMO. I was playing Shaiya and she was saying homophobic things about my friends and I had to say something back.
7. Did the cyberbullying lead to issues offline? A few times

- a. Did it lead to an argument or physical confrontation of any sort? Please explain. I got into a fight once over Anti-Semitic comments connected online. My boyfriend also got into an argument that almost resulted in a fight in the middle of the street over Anti-Semitism with my sister's boyfriend who said Anti-Semitic things.
  - b. Did you feel ostracized? Yes. It is not just me. I feel ostracized by certain groups and even my family with the fallout.
  - c. Did you feel isolated? Yes. Sometimes I just didn't know how to feel. I just wanted to be alone.
  - d. Did you have trouble getting along with others during your victimization? At times. The fights and things with intolerance. I was not raised that way.
8. Explain how the victimization made you feel.
- a. Were you depressed? No
  - b. Were you angry? Yes. I did get into a fight at a bar once over Anti-Semitic comments made to me online.
  - c. Were you frustrated? Very. It is not like you can just go up to someone and shake it out of them while you're online.
9. Do you believe that people act differently online than they do offline? If yes, continue to prompts. Yes
- a. Do you think that having a hidden identity impacts their behavior online? Yes. They're hiding behind a screen and it is different in real life. They can't say those things to your face.

- b. Do you think that people say mean things online that they would not say offline?  
Yes. If they said it in real life, they could be ostracized or knocked down a peg or two.
  - c. Do the morals of people change when they are online? There are no real social rules online. People say whatever they say and they don't care about feelings. It is like a cage match in wrestling...like a no holds barred fight or something where anything goes. Sorry about the wrestling reference, but it sounded good for an example.
10. Were you bullied in your in school years in ways other than cyberbullying? If yes,  
prompt. Yes
- a. Was there a connection between the bullying and your cyberbullying victimization? No.
11. How would you say that cyberbullying compares to traditional bullying? I would say that cyber can be worse because it is not really directed at one person. It is directed at everyone so that there is a large audience and everyone can see it.
12. Explain how you coped with the emotions related to cyberbullying.
- a. Who did you turn to? Friends.
    - vi. Why did you choose to turn to them? Age. They relate.
  - b. Did you find any activities or pastimes that helped? Reading. Gets my mind off of it.
  - c. What else seemed to help? Nothing really.
13. Please explain how your experience with cyberbullying victimization impacted your performance in school in each of the following areas.

- a. Distraction Yes. Mostly in lit class where I was really bored. I did lose focus and I remember it clearly.
  - b. Grades Yes, especially in lit my senior year. I didn't really like the class and my mind would wander and my grades did drop.
  - c. State Mandated Tests Not at all.
  - d. Attendance Definitely. I was mad and didn't want to come to school and take it out on the wrong person.
  - e. Trouble resulting in discipline No.
14. Did you tell anyone about your victimization? Just friends and you, but I didn't tell you while it was happening.
15. Please explain why you decided to tell or not to tell each of the following groups of individuals listed below (please input your answer beside the prompt).
- a. Friends They relate to me and I can trust them. They will also be direct with me and tell me when I was wrong.
  - b. Parents No. They are digital natives...no, I mean immigrants. I read that somewhere and it talked about how they don't understand things online. I am still trying to teach them to use Facebook. Guitar hero didn't work out that well either. They really don't understand things online or how it works.
  - c. Teachers I really didn't want to bother them. They have enough to think about.
  - d. School administrators No. They could make it worse than it is by getting involved.
  - e. Counselors No. I really didn't want her to know or talk about it.



- f. Law enforcement officers Police in this town? Really? If they don't know you, they will take you to jail. They would cause more problems. Way more problems.
  - g. Are there any other people that you told that did not fall into one of these groups?  
Not that I can think of.
16. What reaction did you receive from those you told about cyberbullying? Were you satisfied with their response? Most of the time. They listened and supported me. They also told me when I was wrong and needed to just leave it alone. I liked their honesty.
17. Did telling people about the cyberbullying stop the cyberbullying? Not really. It sort of just ran its course and ended.
- a. How did each individual or group that you told help or fail to help? Only my friends helped, but not directly. Just listening and supportive.
18. Was it worth the effort to tell people? Yeah. It got it off my mind and gave me perspective.
- a. Do you wish you had told more people? No.
  - b. Do you wish you had not told some people? Yes. A few of my friends had big mouths and they took it back and made it worse. You just have to be careful how much you say and who you say it to.
19. Did you respond to the bully online after you were cyberbullied? Yes
- a. If yes, how? I did speak back, but I didn't go to their level. I just pointed out that they were wrong for what they said in a passive aggressive way. It is just how I am, but they got the point that I was not happy about it.
  - b. If no, what was the result?

20. Did you respond to the bully offline after you were cyberbullied? Not really. I pretty much ignored them until they felt the need to apologize. I guess that even after they did, I still ignored them and acted just like the wind was blowing when they talked. I really didn't want to hear them at all, but I was passive about it most of the time. There were the few arguments and fights.
- a. If yes, how? Arguments and fights that I talked about earlier.
21. Did it result in any problems or feelings the next time that you met the cyberbully face to face? A few times.
- a. Please explain. I already said most of them. The others I just got irritated, but I just ignored them.
22. Do you believe that school leaders understand cyberbullying? To a point. I think they are immigrants to so I don't know if it is really all that real to them. Sticks and stones I guess.
- a. Can they do anything about it? If it is on their turf, yes. If not, they really can't.
  - b. Is it worth reporting? It depends on the severity. If it is bad enough, you have to try if someone's life is threatened or something, but they can't really do anything unless it is at school.
23. Do you believe that school leaders can help solve the problem? No. Not right now. They have got to understand it better and know what it is really like.
24. Do you believe that law enforcement officers can help solve the problem? Not at all. They wouldn't do anything unless it was a death threat or it was in real life. It just doesn't seem real to them at all and they don't understand much anyway.
25. Why did you agree to be a participant in this study? I think that it is cool how things are done online and how you are trying to make other people aware. It gives another

perspective as each of us talk and I hope that it gives more perspective to the problem so that more people understand it better. I really agree with the way you are doing the study by talking to us the way you talked about when we signed up and hearing all of the stories to get a better idea of what it is like.

**Walt Individual Interview**

1. Tell me about yourself.

What is your age? 18

Which race or ethnicity do you most closely identify with? White

What are your career goals? Military. I have signed up with the Marines.

Describe the technology that you commonly use in your personal life? Cell Phones

2. What did you enjoy the most about high school? Girls and my Senior Year

3. How would you describe yourself during your scholastic experience at Pineland High School? (School name is not really Pineland High...I only did this to maintain confidentiality within the appendix of the dissertation.)

How were your grades in high school? Not real good, but I graduated.

Did you get in trouble in high school that resulted in In-School or Out-Of-School

Suspension? A lot in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades. A couple of times after that.

If yes, did you get in trouble that resulted in ISS or OSS in some years more than others? Which years did you have the most disciplinary problems? Mostly 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. No doubt.

4. How did you feel about the teachers and administrators at your school?

Were they demanding of you academically? Not all

Do you think that they cared about you and your success? A couple

Did you trust them? The couple or few that cared.

5. Describe the frequency of your technology use in high school for each of the following prompts.

Cell Phones (Including Text Messaging) Yes. A lot.

Social Networking A whole lot. Sometime on my phone in class.

Chat Rooms Not at all

Instant Messaging Nope

Video Sharing Some

Email No

***Read and provide a copy of the cyberbullying definition of Parry Aftab at this point.***

Cyberbullying occurs “when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones”.

1. Describe your definition of cyberbullying. That sounds right. I fully agree.
2. What grade(s) were you in when you were cyberbullied? All starting in middle school. I can't remember a year when something didn't happen.
3. Did you know the bully(s) beforehand? Every time I can remember, except when some of my exes boyfriends got into it.
  - a. Did you know him/her offline? If yes, please elaborate. All of the ones that it started with through school or friends. Mostly exes.
  - b. Did you know them online? If yes, please elaborate. Some of the exes new boyfriends. I didn't really know them at all, but I could see their names online.
  - c. Where did you get to know them first? School mostly
  - d. How long did you know them? Some years, some not so long. Girlfriends don't always last too long.
  - e. Did you consider the cyberbully to be a friend of yours? Yeah, some of them were and are now.

4. What caused your cyberbullying victimization to start? Different things. It mostly had to do with relationships. I did some things to make some girls mad and they were the main problem,
  - a. Were there offline causes? If yes, please elaborate. I'd say that cheating on girls and dating their friends was the biggest problem. Sometimes it would be between them and I would get dragged into it.
  - b. Were there online causes? If yes, please elaborate. Things posted on Facebook sometimes. Status changes caused a couple of problems when they'd see that I was with one of their friends and get mad.
5. How many times were you cyberbullied? I have no idea. A lot.
  - a. Over what period of time? Most lasted a few days. Some one or two postings. I can't really remember any that lasted over a week.
6. Please explain how each method was used to cyberbully you online as I give you a prompt. If a method was not used to cyberbully you, just tell me.
  - a. Cell Phone Yes. Texts, Facebook, and calls too.
  - b. Social Network Yes. Facebook.
  - c. Instant Messaging No
  - d. Chat Room No
  - e. Email No
  - f. Video Sharing No
  - g. Was any other method used that I did not mention? Please explain. No
7. Did the cyberbullying lead to issues offline? Yes.

- a. Did it lead to an argument or physical confrontation of any sort? Please explain.  
Mostly arguments. I did not get into any fights over it, but I thought I would.
  - b. Did you feel ostracized? Yes. Mostly from girls. When my exes got mad and posted things, her friends that were also my friends wouldn't have anything to do with me for a while. I'd try to talk to them and they'd act like they didn't want me to be there.
  - c. Did you feel isolated? Yes, but most of it was on me. It was my way of dealing with it. I would go in my room and lock the doors. I sometimes hit and kicked the walls. I am going to have to use some of my money from the Marines to fix some of it.
  - d. Did you have trouble getting along with others during your victimization? Yes. I just wanted to be by myself. People really got on my nerves when something like that was going on.
8. Explain how the victimization made you feel.
- a. Were you depressed? A little bit. I admit it. I guess that is why I wanted to be by myself.
  - b. Were you angry? Yes. Definitely. That explains the holes in my walls that I have got to fix. If I wouldn't have hit it, I may have hit them. It was my way of getting past it all.
  - c. Were you frustrated? Yeah, especially when you aren't sure who is saying things. People that said things sometimes say it wasn't them and that someone had hacked their account and posted not them. That was truly frustrating when you don't know the truth.

9. Do you believe that people act differently online than they do offline? If yes, continue to prompts. Yes.

a. Do you think that having a hidden identity impacts their behavior online? Like I said, they can hide or they can deny things. When you aren't sure who is doing it, you can't be sure who to go after. They feel safe. In person, they would probably get hit with some of the things they say.

b. Do you think that people say mean things online that they would not say offline? Yes. They feel secure from a distance and behind a screen. There is no reaction like there is in person and people have time to calm down. If they said it in person, they would get hit.

c. Do the morals of people change when they are online? Yes. They say things they would never say when they are behind a computer. They don't have to look anyone in the face where they could see how they may react in person. They're really scared and cowards to tell the truth.

10. Were you bullied in your in school years in ways other than cyberbullying? If yes, prompt. Yes. I think everyone is, especially in middle school.

a. Was there a connection between the bullying and your cyberbullying victimization? I don't think so. No.

11. How would you say that cyberbullying compares to traditional bullying? I think it's worse because it is so visible to so many people. It will be there for weeks for anybody to see whenever they want and as many times as they want to. It just won't go away and you can't take it off or do anything to stop it.

12. Explain how you coped with the emotions related to cyberbullying.



- a. Who did you turn to? Nobody really.
    - vii. Why did you choose to turn to them?
  - b. Did you find any activities or pastimes that helped? Football helped because I was busy. I also hit a punching bag and I did go out drinking and stuff with friends, but I didn't talk to them about it.
  - c. What else seemed to help?
13. Please explain how your experience with cyberbullying victimization impacted your performance in school in each of the following areas.
- a. Distraction Yes. I would think about it instead of listening sometimes. I did also post and look at Facebook in class sometimes.
  - b. Grades Yes. I was distracted, so it probably did.
  - c. State Mandated Tests No
  - d. Attendance Not really, but maybe once or twice. I really didn't like school much anyway until my last year, so anything was an excuse not to go.
  - e. Trouble resulting in discipline Yes. Trouble from the arguments. I got ISS.
14. Did you tell anyone about your victimization? Not really unless they asked.
15. Please explain why you decided to tell or not to tell each of the following groups of individuals listed below (please input your answer beside the prompt).
- a. Friends Didn't really talk about problems with them. It was my business mostly, but I did talk to a few that asked me about it. I guess they helped a little by telling me not to worry about it.
  - b. Parents No. They would try to make me feel better and that would just make it worse. If they would have gotten into it, that would have really made it worse.

- c. Teachers I didn't trust them enough to talk to them at the time. They would have probably made it worse.
  - d. School administrators No way. I didn't trust them at all. I only said what I had to when I was in trouble and I never really told them anything about online stuff. They couldn't help and wouldn't have done anything.
  - e. Counselors No. It was my business.
  - f. Law enforcement officers No. I don't like cops at all and didn't want to be known for ratting anyone out.
  - g. Are there any other people that you told that did not fall into one of these groups?  
No.
16. What reaction did you receive from those you told about cyberbullying? Were you satisfied with their response? I didn't tell many people, so it really didn't matter and I didn't want to make it worse.
17. Did telling people about the cyberbullying stop the cyberbullying? No
- a. How did each individual or group that you told help or fail to help? Friends would tell me to not worry about it or that it would go away, but I didn't like talking about it. Unless they saw it, I wouldn't say nothing at all.
18. Was it worth the effort to tell people? No
- a. Do you wish you had told more people? No
  - b. Do you wish you had not told some people? No, I really didn't tell anybody.
19. Did you respond to the bully online after you were cyberbullied?
- a. If yes, how? I said things back. I never started it, but I am going to stand up for myself. I called some people names and cussed them out, but they deserved it.

They started it, I just couldn't let them talk about me like that without saying something.

b. If no, what was the result?

20. Did you respond to the bully offline after you were cyberbullied? Yes

a. If yes, how? I got in several arguments. It really didn't go past words

21. Did it result in any problems or feelings the next time that you met the cyberbully face to face? Yes.

a. Please explain. I got mad. I got into a few arguments and cussed some people out at school. That's what got me in ISS. It ended there, but I had to stand up for myself where people could see it after what they said for everyone to see online.

22. Do you believe that school leaders understand cyberbullying? Not at all. They don't understand what it feels like because they have never been in the situation.

a. Can they do anything about it? Not unless it happens at school.

b. Is it worth reporting? No.

23. Do you believe that school leaders can help solve the problem? No.

24. Do you believe that law enforcement officers can help solve the problem? Not at all. I don't think that they know as much as principals do. They couldn't understand if they wanted to.

25. Why did you agree to be a participant in this study? You helped me graduate and you were my favorite teacher. You are trying to help out with a problem that I had and you really care about it. I thought I'd return the favor and help you. I hope that you can use what I dealt with to help other people.

**APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPTS****FOCUS GROUP 1**

1. What grade(s) were you in when you were cyberbullied?

Walt: All of them since middle school.

Haley: Same here. I had some every year.

Dan: Me too. 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>.

2. How many of you knew the bully(s) beforehand?

Dan: I knew all but one.

Walt: I knew all of them. Well, some people that I really didn't know jumped in on it too when I talked back.

Haley: I had some that jumped on me when I tried to defend my friend on Facebook. They started in on me and they didn't know me at all.

Dan (typed): Happened 2 me 2.

3. Based on your personal experience, what types of events can cause cyberbullying victimization to start?

Walt: Most of mine came from dating problems. Ex-girlfriends and bad breakups.

Dan: I had some of those too. I even had one that got mad at me for winning a game online, but I had no idea who they were. I didn't know that people could get so mad over nothing. They could have been from China for all I know.

Walt (Typed): LOL! Never had that happen over a game! Too crazy.

Haley: Same stuff. Just all kinds of drama. Breakups can start a real problem, most of them I think. That and just jealousy of other people.

Walt: True on the jealousy. People are way too jealous.

4. What methods were used to in your cyberbullying (ex. Texting, Facebook, Instant Messaging, ect.)

Dan: Facebook. Facebook. Facebook. It is everywhere on there. The chat room site was just wild. I did have a video posted on YouTube too.

Walt. Same here with Facebook. That was about it for me. Well, there were a few texts too.

Dan (typed): 4got about texts.

Haley: I agree. Facebook...it is everywhere. I had the texts and maybe a video posting too.

a. Which do you consider to be the most hurtful or harmful? Why?

Walt: I'd say Facebook because it is out there for everyone to see and it doesn't go away. People can just keep going back and seeing what is said and say more anytime they want to.

Dan: It's hard to say. I think Facebook too, but the video thing is pretty bad too. I guess it is something about it being you in an embarrassing video where it keeps playing a real life thing. It is more than words and that makes it tough.

Haley: I will go with Facebook because of how many people see it. The video was disturbing too, but I had to ignore it. I am not even sure if it was or is online. Either way, I just didn't want to see it. I didn't want to imagine how bad I would feel if I did see it, so I ignored it.

5. Explain how the victimization made you feel.

Dan: Depressed at times, mad, confused and frustrated. It depends on which time you are talking about. Some were different than others.

Haley: I am too happy of a person to be depressed. I did really get mad at a few people and frustrated with the ones where I couldn't figure out who they really were. Mad and frustrated at the same time.

Walt: I pretty much just got mad. A little depressed maybe, but I just wanted to be alone and hit something.

6. Do you believe that people act differently online than they do offline?

Haley (typed) : Yes,

Dan( typed): Yes.

Walt (typed): Yes.

- a. If yes, please elaborate.
- b. Haley: I think that they are cowards. They sit behind a computer and say all kinds of things because they feel like they can't be touched. They would not do it in real life because they would be scared of what might happen.
- c. Walt: I was gonna say the same thing. They are cowards and they would get hit in the face if they said it to my face. It is easy to feel safe behind a computer when nobody knows who you are.
- d. Dan: Yall said what I was gonna say. Not much more to say but they are cowards and they are scared to do it in person. It doesn't take much of a person to say mean things when they are hiding behind something.

7. How would you say that cyberbullying compares to traditional bullying?

Dan: It is way worse. Everyone can see it. It just gets put out there and it doesn't go away.

I'm not really that big and have been bullied. It goes away and only lasts a few minutes.

When you leave school or go home, it goes away. Online, it just stays out there.

Walt: I agree. I have just had to turn my phone off before and leave it in another room and go to my room. I would have broken it. I knew it was still going, but at least I didn't have to see it. Even if you are just waiting on a call, Facebook comes up with a message and you know what it is.

Haley: I think they are both bad. They both hurt really badly, so I don't really know. Bullying is very scary, but online stuff just doesn't go away. It is really hard to decide, but it really doesn't matter. They both hurt.

8. Did you find any activities or pastimes that helped you cope with cyberbullying victimization?

Haley (typed): Not really.

Walt: Anything to get your mind away from it. Football helped, just hanging out with friends drinking helped too.

Dan: I did the drinking with friends too. It helped. I liked playing video games too.

Walt: I forgot that I liked to hit a punching bag. Sometimes I hit my walls too and I have a few holes that I've got to fix.

a. What else seemed to help?

Dan: That's all I've got.

Haley: I should have said hanging out with friends.

Walt (typed): That's about it.



9. Who did you tell about your cyberbullying victimization?

Haley: I just told my friends.

Dan: I told my friends, a couple of teachers, and the principal when I got in trouble.

Walt: I told the friends that asked and the principal when I got in trouble, but I didn't tell him much. I would rather keep it to myself. I don't want them in my business.

Dan: They made me talk to the counselor too. It wasn't much fun at all because I really didn't want to hear her try to comfort me and tell me everything would be OK.

Walt (typed): That must have sucked.

Haley (typed): LOL! I agree. That would have sucked.

a. Why did you choose to tell those people?

Dan: I wanted to tell my friends because I trust them. I didn't want to tell the others, but I was in trouble. It was really bad when the counselor tried to be comforting. I was really uncomfortable and just wanted to get out. I was afraid that telling them would make it worse.

Haley: I only told my friends because I trust them. I was like you. I was afraid the others would make it worse and I really didn't want them in my business.

Walt: Until I was a senior, I didn't really trust anyone like that. When my friends asked, I told them. I would rather not have. It is my business and I'd rather deal with it myself.

10. Were you satisfied with their response?

Haley: Yes.

Dan: Not really.

Walt: No.

a. Why or why not?

Haley : I just wanted to talk and they were there to help be and back me up.

Dan: I was OK with my friends, but I really didn't want to tell them in the first place. They didn't do anything but make it weird.

Walt: Not at all. I didn't need them to do anything and I just wanted them to stay out. I didn't want them asking about it all. If I wanted to talk to them, I would have done it.

11. Did telling people about the cyberbullying stop the cyberbullying?

Walt: No. It just stopped after a while.

Dan: I agree. Mine just stopped after I got tired of dealing with it and left it alone..

Haley: I don't know. I don't think it stopped it, but it was nice to have people on my side.

12. Was it worth the effort to tell people?

Haley: Yes. It was nice to have people listen.

Dan: No. Outside of friends, it was a waste of time. Even that really didn't help all that much.

Walt: No. It is my business.

a. Do you wish you had told more people?

Walt: No. It is my business.

Haley: No. I told all the people that I wanted to know.

Dan: No. I had to tell more people than I wanted to tell.

b. Do you wish you had not told some people?

Dan: I wouldn't have told the principal or the counselor for sure. It didn't help anything and they don't understand. I really didn't want to talk to them but I was in trouble and had to.

Walt: I wouldn't have told the principal a thing if I didn't have to. It was a waste of time.

Haley: I don't have much to say here about that. I only told the people I wanted to so I guess not.

13. Did you respond to the bully online after you were cyberbullied?

Haley: Yes.

Dan: Yes.

Walt: Yes

a. If yes, how? Did it help to solve the problem?

Dan: It probably made it worse, but I had to do something. With the stuff that was being said, I had to say something. It probably would have died sooner if I had kept my mouth shut, but I couldn't let it go. I had to fight back.

Walt: That's what I was going to say. I just had to get into the name calling game too. I said a lot back that probably made it worse, but it showed I wasn't just going to take it. When I decided it wasn't worth my time and was too immature, I got away and it stopped after not too much longer.

Haley: It made it worse a couple of times. I told people to leave my friend alone to stand up for her and they turned on me. If I would have stayed out, it probably wouldn't have happened, but I don't regret it I had to stand up for my friend.

Walt (typed): (CLAPS) I agree.

Dan (typed): (CLAPS) Me too.

14. Did you respond to the bully offline after you were cyberbullied?

Walt: I got into some arguments. Just words though, it never came to punches, but it wasn't far away.

Dan: Same with me. Arguments, but no punches. Most of the time, nothing was said at all.

Walt: That's true. Most of the time, nothing was said with me either.

Haley: I got into one argument, but most were online. People are just too scared to say the same things in person.

a. If yes, how? Did it help to solve the problem?

Walt: I got into some arguments. Just words though, it never came to punches, but it wasn't far away.

Dan: Same with me. Arguments, but no punches. Most of the time, nothing was said at all.

Walt: That's true. Most of the time, nothing was said with me either.

Haley: I got into one argument, but most were online. People are just too scared to say the same things in person.

15. Do you believe that school leaders understand cyberbullying?

Haley: I don't think that you can unless you've been through it. You just don't know what it is like and you can't imagine. They don't have friends that are into the drama and all that goes on and they can't understand what it is like to be in the middle of all that.

Dan: No. They don't know how popular Facebook and stuff is. They don't live on Facebook and don't know how many people see things. I think Haley is right. You don't know until you've been there.

Walt: There's not much more to say. You don't know how it feels and some of them barely know how to post on Facebook and all. They can't understand what it is like unless they've been there and they have not.

a. Can they do anything about it?

Walt: Not unless it happens at school. I am not sure that they would even do anything about it then.

Dan: Yep. I agree.

Haley. Only if it happens at school.

b. Is it worth reporting?

Dan: No.

Haley: If it is really bad, it's worth a try.

Walt: No.

16. Do you believe that law enforcement officers can help solve the problem?

Dan: No way. Principals stand a better chance cause at least they deal with students. Police around here won't have a clue about what to do.

Haley: Probably not. I just don't think they would understand it either. They would probably think that they have bigger and more real problems to deal with.

Walt: (LAUGHS) I just had to do that. The police around here can't even ride their bikes without wrecking. What would make me think that one could understand how to handle online problems.

17. Why do you think that cyberbullying studies such as this one are important enough to participate in?

Dan: I just hope it helps people understand it better like you said you were trying to do.

Walt: Same here.

Haley: I agree. I just want to help.

**FOCUS GROUP 2**

1. What grade(s) were you in when you were cyberbullied?

Sandy: 12<sup>th</sup>

Lita: Once in the 9<sup>th</sup> and in the 12<sup>th</sup>.

Jack: It went on in my last two years in school.

Evan: Mostly 11<sup>th</sup>, but some 12<sup>th</sup>.

2. How many of you knew the bully(s) beforehand?

Sandy: I did.

Lita: I knew the one in the 9<sup>th</sup> but not the one in the 12<sup>th</sup>.

Evan: Me too.

Jack: I did as well, but I didn't know one in person. I just knew of them.

3. Based on your personal experience, what types of events can cause cyberbullying victimization to start?

Lita: Rumors and things like that. It is hard to word it, but arguments that take place with people who don't like your friends can get pushed onto you too.

Evan: Rumors and intolerance of people that are different. They like to make fun of people who are different in any sort of way that they don't like or understand.

Jack: All kinds of things. For me, it was things like opinions that make no sense, politics, and intolerance...most of which has to do with religious beliefs.

Sandy: I would say a lot of things. In my experiences, it was intolerance and rumors mostly. I agree with intolerance in general because it happened in a couple of different ways. I have dealt with anti-Semitism because my boyfriend is Jewish and anti-gay stuff because I have friends who live an alternative lifestyle.

Jack: I have not dealt with anti-Semitism, but my religion is a lot different than most others and I am involved with Muskogee culture and traditional practices. Believe me, I know what you are talking about.

Evan: I just wanted to say that I agree with what you all were saying. Religious differences and sexual choice seem to be behind a lot of it because people don't like it or agree with it or think it was wrong. Some of that happened to me too.

Lita: None of that happened to me, but I can see what you are talking about. I believe that sort of thing causes problems all the time.

4. What methods were used to in your cyberbullying (ex. Texting, Facebook, Instant Messaging, ect.)

Lita: Once on Facebook and once on my phone in text messages.

Sandy: Facebook, responses to trolling in chat rooms from people who can't take a joke, and on Shaiya.

Jack: Facebook and texts on my phone.

Evan: Facebook. They commented on my status and my updates.



Which do you consider to be the most hurtful or harmful? Why?

Jack: Facebook, without a doubt. It is so visible. They have you in their territory and anything they post will be seen by all of their friends. Since we had common friends and knew a lot of the same people at school, a lot of people saw what was being said about me.

Sandy: The Facebook one mainly because so many people saw it.

Evan: Facebook is the only one that happened to me, so it was the only choice. It was bad because of how many people saw it online the whole time that it was going on.

Lita: Facebook was bad because everyone can see it, but the phone messages were the worst for me. I didn't know who was sending them or where they got my number. Even if you block them, they can easily get another phone and keep going. It was scary.

5. Explain how the victimization made you feel.

Sandy: I was mad. I think I said that I was frustrated too when I talked to you Mr. Boyd, so I'll go with that too. Basically, I wanted to fight but couldn't get to the person to take it out on them. I guess that's where the frustration came in for the most part.

Evan: I wasn't really mad, but I was very frustrated too. It was just annoying because you feel like you are helpless and there is nothing you can do or anyone you can turn to to make it stop.

Lita: A lot of things. I was angry, frustrated like the others said, and I was depressed. I wanted to fight if I saw them and I was frustrated because I couldn't see them. It was a lot to deal with.

Plus, I am a person who takes everything people say very seriously. I wanted to know why someone would do this to me and who would call me names like a whore for no reason at all. It was all mixed together and the emotions are hard to explain.

Jack: Basically, I felt alone and mad. Things were being said about me that I couldn't do anything about. The things that were being said about me were ignorant and mean. I tried to set it right, but it was clear that they just wanted to get to me and not to listen to me. I was very mad. It really makes you feel alone when you are fighting to get a word in with people who you don't like you on their page. Like I said before, it is like trying to fight a fight on someone else's land when they have all of their people and you have none of yours. You are going to lose and there is nothing you can do about it. It just wants to make you put your fist through a wall since you can't hit them.

6. Do you believe that people act differently online than they do offline?

Lita: Yes.

Sandy: Definitely.

Jack: Oh yeah.

Evan: Yes.

If yes, please elaborate.

Sandy: I think that they say things that they never would say in real life. It is easy to be brave online when you don't have to deal with the person and how they may act once they get mad.

Jack: Yeah, it is like being liquored up. You think you know a person, but when they start drinking they say and do things that they would not normally do. I think

that the Internet is like that, except the braveness that they fell...or I should say coward like stuff to be more accurate...comes from being behind a screen. My analogy comes from the fact that people act differently on both. They seem to feel invincible but for different reasons though.

Evan: I think you both are right. They are brave when nobody can get to them to do anything and they know there is nothing that can really be done to stop them from criticizing. They can just keep talking and keep talking.

Lita: I agree with everyone else. It seems so safe to them and it is difficult to prove. The girl with the phone who texted me could have been anyone. She could have easily got a different phone. If I changed numbers and got a new phone and told people my number, she could get it. She did the first time, so why couldn't she do it again. It is a shield that they hide behind and it is awful.

7. How would you say that cyberbullying compares to traditional bullying?

Jack: I would say that it (OC: Talking about cyber; confirmed in member check) is worse because they can do or say anything they want and you can't do anything to get back to them. In person, you could do something, but they are scared of that so they attack online where they are safe and they know that it gets to you because so many people are always on Facebook.

Sandy: I would say that cyber can be. Just because it is out there for everyone to see and it just keeps going on people's pages and onto their friends' pages. I would say that it is different for everyone and everyone probably wouldn't agree with me.

Lita: Cyber is. It is just so unpredictable. With bullying, you know who it is and something can be done. Not knowing who it is and the fact that they know you don't know just adds another whole factor to the situation.

Evan: I don't know. They are so different. It is like apples and oranges. Physical is scary and it is embarrassing, but maybe not as embarrassing as Facebook. I really don't know, but I would say physical may be worse just because of the physical things that can happen to you if nobody is around that can stop it. It is hard to say.

8. Did you find any activities or pastimes that helped you cope with cyberbullying victimization?

Evan: I wrote a lot of songs. It was a good way to get it off my chest. Just finding something you enjoy...songs and acting helped me.

Jack: I would say that just talking to friends and family. Venting is always good. When you get it off your chest and have people around you to keep you up, it helps.

Lita: Just talking helps. I really can't think of anything else.

Sandy: Mostly reading. You (OC: Sandy was speaking to me here) know that I love to read. It was just an easy way to get my mind off of it all. I did talk to a few people and I guess that helped as well. It is good to have people around to pick you up.

What else seemed to help?

Sandy: I can't think of anything. Sorry.

Evan: That is about it.

Jack: Me either.

Lita: That's all I can think of.

9. Who did you tell about your cyberbullying victimization?

Sandy: I only told my friends. They are the only ones I wanted to tell.

Lita: I told my friends and my parents.

Jack: I talked to my friends and my parents. I have been taught that talking is the way to solve your problems and that if you leave it inside, it gets worse.

Evan: Friends and family mostly, but I did talk to the counselor at school when it got really bad and I was afraid something was going to go on at school.

Why did you choose to tell those people?

Evan: I trust my friends and family and I wanted their support because I didn't do anything wrong. The counselor because I didn't want to get in trouble and mess up my grades at school and I really didn't know of a better place to go. She deals with students and their feelings and I thought she would understand better than the principals. They only worry about stuff after it happens in real life.

Sandy: I trust them. I know they won't take it anywhere else.

Jack: Me too. I trust them and they are there for me when I need them.

Lita: I trust my friends and I trusted them. In the 9<sup>th</sup>, I talked to them like you all said. In the 12<sup>th</sup>, it got really scary and I told my dad so that he could say something about it and help. He called the number that I didn't want to and talked to them.

10. Were you satisfied with their response?

Lita: Yes. On the first one, my friends were there for me. On the second, my dad said some things and it stopped. I couldn't have asked for more.

Jack: Sure. I am not sure that there was anything more that I would have wanted them to do. Sometimes it is better just to listen than to act. My biggest fear was that someone would try to help and end up making the situation worse or last longer. I don't think that there is much more that they could have done that I would have wanted them to,

Sandy: I guess so, for the most part. They were direct with me and I appreciate it when people don't beat around the bush. They told me when I was right and they told me when they thought I shouldn't have said something. I didn't always want to hear that, but I respect and trust them for telling me the truth...even when I don't want to hear it.

Evan: Yes. They wanted to know if I was OK. They checked on me and were on my side.

Jack: I just wanted to say that I like what the girl (OC: Talking about Sandy) just said. My friends are like that too. The last thing that I wanted was someone to tell me that it was all OK and try to hug me or something. Just be honest.

Why or why not?

Jack: They couldn't do much more.

Sandy: (Typed) Oops! I think I just answered that! Sorry!

Lita (Typed under Sandy): Me too.

Evan: I think that was about all they could do. They couldn't end it, but they did what they could to make it easier for me. The counselor tried to stop it. It did not do it completely, but it did get a little less bad.

11. Did telling people about the cyberbullying stop the cyberbullying?

Evan: No. Time is the only thing that can really. I think that what the counselor said to them did make it easier from that point on because they thought that something might happen if they kept on going with it.

Jack: Not at all. I think that they got tired of not getting a reaction anymore and just gave up. It just ran its course and died out naturally.

Lita: Once. The first time, no. Telling my dad did the other time.

Sandy: No, it just sort of died on its own. I think that time helps stop it more than anything.

People have a relatively short attention span when they are being mean to others. They will move on to something else if it is just left alone for a while.

12. Was it worth the effort to tell people?

Lita: Yes. Obviously it was the time my dad stopped it. The other time, I think that it was just to be able to talk and know that people were behind you.

Sandy: I think it was for me for the most part. It was good to talk about it all and know that I had people on my side that did like me and would support me even if they thought I was wrong at times for what I said back.

Jack: It made me feel better, so I'd say yeah.

Evan: I think so. Like you all are saying, it is nice to have the support.

Do you wish you had told more people?

Sandy: No, I just don't think that it would have done much good. It is a touchy subject and if you tell the wrong people it could just keep going or even get worse.

Jack: No. That could be a disaster if you told the wrong person and they ran their mouth.

Evan: Not really.

Lita: I told who I needed to, so no.

Do you wish you had not told some people?

Sandy: One person who had a big mouth. They went and talked and made it worse. That is why I say it can get worse...because it happened to me.

Evan: I agree. I told one person that went and talked and made it worse too.

Jack: No. I know who to trust and who not to. That is why I didn't tell anyone else.

Lita: No. It worked out.

13. Did you respond to the bully online after you were cyberbullied?

Jack: Of course. I had to stand up for myself. I said what I needed to and laid out the facts. He didn't want to accept the truth and wouldn't listen, so I eventually gave up.

Evan: I guess I had a different view. I did not say anything. I just wanted it to end and I thought that if I ignored it it would go away.

Lita: I didn't say anything either. I am not going to lower myself to their level.

Sandy: I did even though I probably shouldn't have. I just couldn't help it. I had to stand up for myself and my friends.

If yes, how? Did it help to solve the problem?



Jack: I think I already answered the first thing you said, but it didn't help anything besides just showing people who were watching that the guy just wouldn't listen.

Sandy: No. If anything, it probably made it keep going. I didn't care. People were seeing the hateful things and I just had to respond so that people would see that I wasn't just going to take it without saying anything. At least they could see my post responding to the bad posts about me.

14. Did you respond to the bully offline after you were cyberbullied?

Evan: Other than talking to the counselor and her bringing him in, no. I didn't want to get into trouble and I didn't want to make it worse by keeping it going.

Sandy: I am a passive-aggressive person. I did get into one argument that involved my boyfriend and anti-Semitism, but I mostly just ignored them until they apologized. After that, I guess I still continued to ignore them because they still aren't in my life.

Lita: When we saw each other the next time in the first one, I gave her a good long stare. I did not say a word, but she got the point. She didn't want to fight me, but I was ready. On the second one, I don't know who it was so I couldn't if I wanted to.

Jack: No. I just tried to ignore them as best I could.

If yes, how? Did it help to solve the problem?

Lita: It didn't start again, so I guess it worked. At the least, it didn't hurt anything.

Sandy: It really didn't, but it didn't make it worse. I guess that staying away kept them from thinking about me and posting something new. In a way, I guess that it sort of indirectly helped to stop it.

Evan: Just with the counselor thing. I already said that it did not stop it completely.

15. Do you believe that school leaders understand cyberbullying?

Jack: No way. You can't imagine until you are there.

Evan: No, because people are different online. They think that the way people act in person is the same way they act online is the way they will act online. They don't realize how different people can be. They see these innocent acting people in school and think they wouldn't hurt anyone because of that. They have no idea what the same people can do on the Internet.

Sandy: I don't really think so. I am not sure that online stuff seems like a big problem to them. They seem more worried about the physical things that carry on at school. Online things don't seem like pressing concerns, especially if they happen away from school. I think that they worry more about the physical than the emotional and since they really aren't on the Internet all the time like we are and on Facebook, I don't think like it seems very real.

Lita: I think that they want to and it is a step in the right direction. I think that learning is the key, but I am not sure that they will unless they have gone through it.

Can they do anything about it?

Jack: If they don't understand it, how can they? In my opinion, they are pretty much lost and incompetent when it comes to the Internet. If it were really extreme and someone made a death threat at school or something really stupid like that, I will give them a maybe.

Sandy: If it happens at school and it is really severe like a threat or something, I think that they would be able to. If it doesn't happen at school, no.

Evan: If it is at school. If it is off campus and just on Facebook, no.

Lita: Not by themselves. They are trying to make more laws now to control it better, but it will take more than just a principal to control the problem.

Is it worth reporting?

Lita: Yes. If they are ever going to start doing stuff about it, people have got to speak up so that they can begin to understand what it is like.

Evan: If you think that something may come out of it to get you in trouble, yes. They need to be aware that something is going on and you are not the one that started all of it.

Sandy: If it is really bad, I think it is. You would really feel bad if they killed themselves or something like you see on TV. If it is just little picking, I don't think so because there is always the chance that getting principals involved can make it worse.

Jack: I was gonna say no, but she (OC: Sandy) made a good point. I guess that you have to say something if it is bad enough. Unless it is really epic, no.

16. Do you believe that law enforcement officers can help solve the problem?

Sandy: No. They think that they have better things to do and they probably do. It doesn't mean that they are doing everything they should about the problems they should be taking care of, but they are more focused on physical violence and drugs and things like that. Cyberbullying just isn't real to them and doesn't seem important enough unless there is a death threat or something involved. They don't understand how bad it is and don't have time to worry about emotional stuff.

Lita: If people tell them, maybe. The problem is that people don't want to be the person that goes to the police.

Jack: No chance in hell. I just don't see how it could help. They are incompetent in every way. They just shot a guy the other day for no reason and they don't like me either. They are the last people that I would tell.

Evan: No. We had a situation like that where I work. They threatened, but they really didn't do anything about it. They can talk, but that is about it. They can't stop stuff on the Internet because it goes much further than Pineland (OC: Not the actual name of the town that he said).

Lita: Maybe I'm wrong, but I just do see how they can begin to be competent unless people start saying something. If it is not bad, I can see not going to them. If it is bad, I think you have to speak up. A threat is a threat. If my dad would not have solved my problem my senior year, I was going to go to the police. I would not have felt bad about it at all.

17. Why do you think that cyberbullying studies such as this one are important enough to participate in?

Sandy: I think that people need to know about other perspectives. I think that talking to people like you are doing is the right way to let people know what it is like.

Evan: I hope that it makes people more aware of what it is really like. That is all for me.

Jack: It is always good to talk. If it helps someone else, that would be great.

Lita: It has to be stopped. People have to speak up and let people know what it is like. I think understanding is the first step.

**APPENDIX E: TWITTER RESPONSES****Richard Pickles (Jack)**

**@hauntedbywaters** Well, you can be a victim online. Even though by laws oh physical details it isn't real, to our generation it is quite real

**@hauntedbywaters** I believe the fact it's online and by physical technicalities not real. Hiding behind a digital mask.

**@hauntedbywaters** Arrogance always plays a part. Some think they can attack others because they believe they're better than the other person.

**Listen to This (Sandy)**

**@hauntedbywaters** Victimization wrong, but my thoughts are that it can be taken lightly because it is just words, which does hurt either way.

**@hauntedbywaters** This depends on the someone, if it is a child then, their parents, and the police.

**@hauntedbywaters** An online argument can be caused by many things but I think the most common 'starter' would be the old 'He said, she said.'

**Giorgio Armani (Evan)**

**@hauntedbywaters** being protected behind a computer screen. They feel irresistible because the victim can't do too much physically.

**@hauntedbywaters** Anybody can help. there are plenty of bystanders. However, one might seek help from a best friend or guidance counselor.

**@hauntedbywaters** they should delete the conversation. If it continues, seek help from the online abuse form or an adult they can trust.

**@hauntedbywaters** it can start by different ways: 1. Jealousy of the victim 2. Bringing physical bullying online.

**Paisley (Carly)**

@hauntedbywaters It is hard to simply be the bigger person because everyone can read what is being sd. It doesn't just go away.

@hauntedbywaters Technology empowers people to say what they wa, when they want, and how they want with no consequences.

@hauntedbywaters People they trust- friends, adults, teachers, mentors, family, etc.

@hauntedbywaters The best thing to do is ignore them, block them, and move on.

@hauntedbywaters Hiding behind a computer screen.

### *Grigori Rasputin (Dan)*

@hauntedbywaters It will never stop. As long as theres Facebook and Twitter it won't end. You can be whoever you wanna be behind a computer.

@hauntedbywaters You can't get hit in the face when behind a screen. You never know how a person is going to react in person. Might get hit!

@hauntedbywaters No one. Not everyones experience is the same. No one will fully understand how you feel about the situation.

@hauntedbywaters Ignore it. If the person is to worried to say it to your face then it isn't anything to worry about.

@hauntedbywaters People just talking and is to scared to say it to there face so online is easier because your hiding behind a screen.

### *Martha Washington (Lita)*

@hauntedbywaters Often it starts because ppl are too afraid to confront the problem face to face, they hide behind a computer.

@hauntedbywaters Online violence has to be addressed now and offenders must face strict punishments or this epidemic will continue forever.

@hauntedbywaters Technology allows ppl to hide behind a screen and not have to face their victims.

@hauntedbywaters An adult in their life that they trust. The adult should be able to handle the situation in a mature way, and make it stop.

@hauntedbywaters People need to take advantage of the features provided by most online sites to report anything "inappropriate."

**Richard Head (Walt)**

**@hauntedbywaters** it is really immature, ppl think that it is funny to mess with ppl and humiliate thm but if it was thm thy wld b embarrass

**@hauntedbywaters** they feel secure behind a computer screen/phone

**@hauntedbywaters** no one truly knows how you feel. Every situation is different.

**@hauntedbywaters** stand up for them selves.

**@hauntedbywaters** Online violence starts from ppl feeling secure behind a computer screen/phone to speak their mind in a way they wouldn't

**Braylee Hicks (Haley)**

**@hauntedbywaters** If you know somebody that is going threw it then tell somebody so that that person can get help before things get worse.

**@hauntedbywaters** Because they try to be somebody there not.

**@hauntedbywaters** A close friend or maybe even a sibling that there close with. They could also turn to a teacher.

**@hauntedbywaters** They should tell a friend or a family member so that they can find a way to help.

**@hauntedbywaters** my opinion most of it may start from jealousy. If someone is jealous of you or what you have there going to bring you down

**APPENDIX F: REFLEXIVITY LOG**

2/12/12

I have contacted potential participants and have secured 7 verbal agreements to participate in the study. While I have spoken with them, I am yet to speak with any of them about anything other than meeting to sign consent forms. I am excited, but nervous. I know what the research says, but I am anxious to hear what cyberbullying victimization is like from the words of the participants. I feel that while I know everything in research, I truly know nothing of the lived experience. I am scheduled to meet with the first participant to sign consent forms tomorrow.

2/13/12

I met with the first participant this evening. Jeff was wonderful through the process of consent and tutorial of Twitter and Second Life. It is amazing how quickly digital natives move into new software. The highlight was his excitement about sharing his story and being a part of a groundbreaking project. While he shared no information with me this evening, he told me how excited he was to be helping to build a foundation about the horrible experience of cyberbullying. How exciting!

I am scheduled to meet with the second potential participant, Lita, tomorrow. I am truly excited now!

2/20/12

I interviewed my first participant tonight on Second Life. The system worked really well and everything went as anticipated. Lita provided me with great information and I was amazed at how accurate the research seemed to be in some areas according to her statements during the interview session. While many areas of the research were very accurate, there were areas where her experience seemed to stand in contrast. I cannot wait until tomorrow night to see what Walt has to say! I still feel as I know very little and I have the impression that just because one experience agrees with the research, it does not mean that all will.

2/22

Wow. Walt had some amazing things to say. It was obvious from the very beginning that while Lita was calm, Walt was much more emotionally angry during his victimization. His anger does not seem to be present at all now, but he seems very angry that people would do that to someone else. His experience was much more internalized, but much of it agreed with the research as well as the information that I gathered from Lita. The Second Life interview went according to plan with no malfunction during the session.

2/23/12

I spoke with Dan tonight for his interview session. Second Life functioned well yet again. His session led me into the diversity of the experience that I had not seen in other sessions. He had multiple experiences that stemmed from relationship issues to a problem from an online gaming site. He seemed really focused on the point that a plethora of things can cause the issue online and off and that morality is definitely compromised upon entering the online atmosphere. While not as angry as Walt, there were some similarities in their experience that stand out and even seem to connect well with Lita.



I realize that I am getting ahead of myself, but it is difficult not to look for similarities during the process. I am fighting the desire to compare data still stuck in my head from the interviews, but I to realize that it is not the point to begin. Human nature makes me want to investigate what I have, but I will not do so until the appropriate time. Being a researcher is difficult! Additionally, I am amazed at how well writing a log actually helps maintain the course of research. I have much to learn from this phenomenon and cannot wait until the next interview.

2/24/12

I interviewed Haley this afternoon in Second Life. All went well as usual, though she was a few minutes late and I almost panicked a bit. When she arrived, I really did not know what to expect as she has always been soft spoken with me. I guess it is different online to a point because she had no problem at all telling me what she thought. A great deal of her information sounded like things that I had heard from the other interviews, but I am still trying not to compare anything just yet. I have a feeling that the focus groups will be an even bigger challenge if there are things that they agree on. Again, researching is tough but I will follow my procedures as directed.

2/25/12

I interviewed Sandy online tonight. She had some really interesting things to say about intolerance, especially relating to religious intolerance. To this point, nobody had been direct about intolerance, but there may have been some illusions mentioned. She was very outspoken as I had expected, yet possibly more so than I thought.

She was very passionate about the subject and, at the end, mentioned specifically how much she agreed with the online nature of the research. She told me, without any cues whatsoever, that the fact that I was investigating in that manner was the reason that she was so enthusiastic and willing share. Not only did it serve to work to strengthen my suspicions on disinhibition online, but it was very validating for my choices in online research!

2/26/12

I interviewed Jack tonight. It was quite the interview. Jack is a very intelligent yet misunderstood person. Much of it stems from his close association with his Native American ancestry and culture, a practice relatively rare to this area. He dances traditional dances and practices many primitive rituals, making him somewhat of a target from what he revealed to me. His stories, particularly his tendency to make analogies was particularly fascinating and told a real story into his thoughts and emotions. He was very outspoken and direct.

His version of intolerance brought back memories of Sandy's interviews regardless of how hard I tried not to remember her data. I am fighting the desire to start to think of intolerance as a cause. I simply need to remember that there is a long way to go and not to build any preconceived notions. Now I really understand why all of the core questions need to be formulated ahead of data collection. It would be so easy to deviate now, but I will not.

2/ 27/12

I don't have anybody to interview tonight. I am simply writing because I had a strong desire to go back and listen to Jack's recording. Of course, I did not do it because I still have interviews to go, but I had the desire nonetheless to go back and listen again.

2/28/12

I interviewed Carly tonight in Second Life. It was amazing as usual. I am beginning to notice a pattern in interviews that I felt I should note. While some may have been cyberbullied multiple times, they tend to continually revert back to the memories of their most impactful victimization when they are talking about it. Carly seems to have had one of the more intense instances that I have interviewed and as she kept doing it, I began to realize that some of the others did as well.

3/1/12

Tonight I conducted the interview with Evan on Second Life. Everything went smoothly as usual although Evan was slightly late. I was worried for a bit, but he finally arrived and was very enthusiastic and gave me some great information. His information on how physical behaviors can lead to online victimization was particularly intriguing.

I am now finished with the first phase of data collection. I have set up 2 group session times for the next week. Based on their general schedules that I inquired of them prior to the interview sessions, I have set the meeting times for next Tuesday at 6 PM and another for next Wednesday at 8 PM. Some generally work until 7 PM, so I differentiated the times in hopes of getting everyone to one session or the other. I made the appropriate adjustment on my Second Life security setting to allow for all members to be allowed in the interview room at once, which was a practice that I avoided during the individual interviews.

From my practice in Second Life, I have realized that organization will be the key to success here. In addition to my recording equipment which has worked well to this point, I need to keep track of who is speaking. I have decided to get a list of the questions, space greatly between each one, and write the first letter of the name and the first 2-3 words each person says so that I can remember who is speaking. I am afraid that if I do not, I will lose track of time.

3/6/12

I held my first group session in Second Life today. I am really glad that I thought of writing down the initial and first words of each person during the interview. I think that it would be a complete disaster trying to transcribe data if I had not. I was pleased with the flow of the group session and I believe that I got some wonderful data, although I really have to transcribe it before any of it really sinks in. I cannot remember which person said what at this point, so I cannot wait to get into the data. On another note, I was really pleased that everyone followed directions really well concerning the privacy of outside individuals and themselves. I requested that they refrain from mentioning the names of others and I could not have asked for a group of people to follow directions any better than they did.

3/7/12

Last night was almost a carbon copy of the previous night, but only with an additional person involved. They followed directions really well and the conversation rotated fairly well between the participants. Some of the discussion, particularly Jack, went into interesting comparisons. He

seems to have a real knack for comparing to real-life scenarios. The others in the group were passionate as well, but that is not to say that the other group was not. The previous group seemed to take it in a more lighthearted manner, but that was an exceptional experience as well. I must say that in addition to being academically oriented, I really enjoyed the focus group discussions! Now I will move on to asking participants to share their thoughts on Twitter starting on Friday! I cannot wait to see how the micro-blog style forum contributes to the data collection process. I could not be more pleased with my time in Second Life!

3/9/12

I opened up the Twitter area today for participants to comment by sending out a tweet asking for participants to share any information that may come to mind.

3/12/12

I sent out tweets today asking participants to share any more information that may come to mind on how technology influences behavior, what victims should do and turn to when attacked, and any final thoughts they may have on cyberbullying.

3/24/12

After receiving tweets from all participants, I have decided to shut down the Twitter account because one of my participants is leaving for basic training tomorrow. I have to admit, I could not have asked for a more dedicated group of participants. They followed all of the directions that I gave them and did a phenomenal job of giving direct and detailed answers. It has been an amazing journey to this point with people willing to openly share their information about a disturbing phenomenon in their lives. I have a much better grasp on their shared experience that I could have ever imagined. What an experience! WOW. Breathe.

**APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL LETTER**

January 25, 2012  
Michael Boyd

IRB Approval 1212.012512: A Phenomenological Investigation of the Origination and Manifestation of the Cyberbully/Cyberbullying Victim Relationship from the Perspective of Cyberbullying Victims

Dear Michael,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**  
*IRB Chair, Associate Professor*  
**Center for Counseling & Family Studies**  
**(434) 592-5054**

**APPENDIX H: RESOURCES FOR PARTICIPANTS**

## Free Resources

If you have any feelings of anxiety and depression, there are many free resources available online to help you deal with your emotions. A couple of the most well-known examples are

<http://www.ncpc.org/cyberbullying/>

<http://www.cyberbullying.us>

For any future incidents or help with dealing with the fallout of your past victimization, you may find the following website helpful.

<http://www.wiredsafety.com>

Here are the names and contact information for some of the psychologists in the area to contact if you should feel the need to talk to someone beyond the free resources listed above. All costs incurred will be your responsibility.

Lori Nelson  
P.O. Box 2446  
Thomasville, GA  
(229)227-1295  
[lori@lorinelson.net](mailto:lori@lorinelson.net)

Leslie Parsons  
329 N Broad Street  
Thomasville, GA 31792  
(229)403-1512

Katherine Howell  
7263 Hall Road  
Thomasville, Ga 31792  
(229)228-5192  
[DrCBHowell@gmail.com](mailto:DrCBHowell@gmail.com)

Joe Garmon  
200 Gordon Ave  
Thomasville, GA 31792  
(229) 226-0741

**APPENDIX I: MEMBER CHECK VERIFICATION**

I have read the transcriptions and the analysis of the meaning of my statements. I have discussed the transcribed information with Michael Boyd and have clarified any misunderstandings. I hereby certify that the transcribed information and the interpretation of my statements are accurate.

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