EDUCATORS’ PERSPECTIVES ON HAVING BEEN CYBER HARASSED:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

The abuse of individuals through electronic means, typically of students by other students, has been researched extensively. The electronic abuse of other individuals through electronic means has received a dearth of research attention. The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore, describe, and expand the knowledge base regarding the cyber harassment of adult educators by students or other adults. The study was conducted in three rural Georgia public school systems and gave voice to educators’ cyber harassment experiences. Co-researchers were identified through a short electronic survey, and the experiences of consenting participants were documented through a focus group, individual interviews, and guided journal reflections. Results indicated that the educators are, in fact, experiencing cyber harassment, and it does have negative, lasting effects. Two overarching themes present throughout the data analysis included the verification and validation of the phenomenon of cyber harassment and the unpreparedness of north Georgia educators to deal with it.

Descriptors: bullying, cyberbullying, cyber harassment, online harassment, online abuse, digital technology, Internet, educator abuse.
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Acknowledgments

“In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.” Proverbs 3:6

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my “heavenly Father” whose strength and guidance I call upon each and every day. To all the educators who have been affected by cyber harassment; it is my hope that this dissertation be used as a tool to increase awareness of this issue and provide a voice for all those silent victims. Dr. Billie Holubz and Dr. Lucinda Spaulding: thank you for your guidance and assistance. I have gained a lot of knowledge under your direction. Dr. Becky Smith: thank you for believing in me and not giving up even when you could have. Paige: my cheerleader, thanks for the DAILY encouragement and support you found time to give me. My family: God has tremendously blessed me with kind, compassionate, and supportive family members, children, and grandchildren. You are by far the best thing that has ever happened to me.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Tim Berners-Lee offered the first World Wide Web dial-up connection to the public in 1989, and there are now approximately 2.4 billion worldwide Internet users (World Internet Users Statistics Usage and World Population Stats, 2013). The Pew Internet and American Life Project (2012) detailed that 80% of U.S. adults’ age 18 or older have the technology skills to access the Internet. Common uses of the Internet by adults include sending and receiving email, checking weather forecasts, shopping, and utilizing how-to websites (Pew Project, 2012).

Today’s American schools house a variety of electronic devices, often with Internet connectivity, used as learning tools aimed at increasing student engagement. Without a doubt, young people embrace the Internet and mobile communication with assumed expertise and ease (Prensky, 2012). A study by Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr (2010) reported that two-thirds of youth between the ages of 12 and 17 go online every day to do schoolwork, converse with peers, play online games, or pursue some other interests. However, not all activities on the Web are construed as positive.

In an age characterized by rapid technological advances, a new era of student bullying has arrived—cyberbullying (Coloroso, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski, 2007; Li, 2007; Shariff, 2009; Strom & Strom, 2005; Willard, 2007). Patchin and Hinduja (2006) defined cyberbullying as “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text” (p. 149). The specific names for electronic-related abuse vary by author and have been referred to as cyberbullying, cyber harassment, or simply cyber abuse. Dramatic news reports continue to surface of youth pushed to their limits by peers who are bullying them electronically (Megan Meier’s Story, 2012; Ryan’s Story Presentation, 2012; Spaulding, 2010). The general public, as well as school communities, have voiced their concerns about the horrific acts of online cruelty
some youths have carried out against their peers. While youth’s online harassment of peers is a growing trend that has garnered attention in the media, as well as in research, the electronic harassment of educators by students, parents, and colleagues is equally disturbing. Students are not the sole victims in cyberspace.

Phippen (2011), a United Kingdom researcher, conducted a study of online teacher abuse and reported that educators are often not viewed as authority figures, but as fair game for abuse if parents or students dislike what is happening in the classroom. Other recent surveys indicated that educators worldwide have become the target of online harassment (Norton, 2011; US School Boards Association, 2006). In the United States, specific reports of educator electronic abuse are becoming more prolific in the popular media. In 2012, Robert Esparza of Arizona created a fake pornography profile of his son’s assistant principal, allegedly in retaliation for his confiscation of Mr. Esparza’s son’s iPod©. Following a weeklong trial, Esparza was convicted of two felonies: computer fraud and identity theft (Popkin, 2012). Other electronic assaults against educators include reports of a sixth grader sending sexually explicit emails about a teacher to other students and a high school student posting false allegations on Facebook© about being groped while being fitted for a uniform (Eder, 2012).

The phenomenon of educator cyber harassment was the focus of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study. In an attempt to better understand the phenomenon, I gave voice to a group of North Georgia educators who have been cyber harassed. This study fills a gap in the research literature regarding this phenomenon by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the phenomenon from those who have experienced it.

**Background**

Bullying is defined by the Oxford Dictionary (n.d) as “the act of using strength or power
to harm or intimidate those who are weaker,” and has been a challenge in schools for as long as schools have existed (Olweus, 1978, 1993). Historically, bullying has been conceptualized as face-to-face, peer-to-peer interactions with some aspect of power imbalance between the individuals (Olweus, 1993). With the advent and availability of electronic devices, youth naturally fell into the practice of bullying peers electronically. The perceived anonymity afforded by electronic devices, as well as the ability to communicate in a way other than face-to-face, has emboldened youth to interact with peers in a manner that they may not otherwise engage (Coloroso, 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Shariff, 2008). Furthermore, these circumstances give youth a venue to interact in a negative manner with those whom they would not otherwise interact—authority figures. It therefore comes as no surprise that youth have widened their targeted audience to include educators in their electronic abuse. Phippen (2011), a professor at the University of Plymouth, United Kingdom, reported that 35% of 377 educator respondents or their colleagues had been recipients of some form of online abuse from students or parents. The United States National School Boards Association (2006) conducted a similar survey \(N = 250\) in which 26% of teachers and principals reported that they had been the targets of cyber harassment at the hands of students or parents.

The phenomenon of the cyber harassment of educators exists in many different forms and is achievable with various electronic devices including direct harassment via email, instant messaging, chat room exchanges, Website posts, and digital messages or images sent between cell phones or other electronic devices. Cyber harassment may take the form of vulgar or threatening messages, but it can also be comprised of the sending or posting of inappropriate images or video without the consent of the subject in the photo or video. Likewise, it can include posting private, sensitive information about another person through electronic means such as the
Internet or cell phones. Further, cyber harassment may involve impersonating someone else in order to embarrass or humiliate another person (Coloroso, 2003; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Shariff, 2009).

Researchers have posited that cyber harassment, like cyberbullying, is probably under reported (Coloroso, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Olweus, 1994; Shariff, 2009; Trolley & Hanel, 2010). When adults face online abuse, especially teachers and administrators, the anti-authority nature of the act may discourage their reporting of it. Shariff (2009) pointed out that the media only reports extreme cases of educator cyber harassment, usually those that result in physical harm. The more frequently occurring, but less extreme cases of cyber harassment likely result in daily mental anguish that are hidden and unreported. Those who have experienced cyber harassment are left to contend privately with “greater psychosomatic problems, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and poor overall mental and physical health” (Shariff, 2009, p. 37).

Situation to Self

In my previous job as a technology specialist, I witnessed the power and possibilities inherent in the amazing advances that have occurred in the telecommunications industry over recent years. Though my focus was providing educators with positive ways to use some of the newly available technology tools to improve student learning, I was cognizant of the fact that such tools could also be used in a negative manner, and I witnessed the abuse first-hand. The negative aspect of technology use led me to begin researching the phenomenon of student-to-student cyberbullying, about which there is a rich research base. During my research, an article sparked my recollection of a colleague sharing an experience that occurred in her high school classroom. She was deliberately provoked by a student whose confederates recorded her
response on cell phones and posted it online. In sharing her humiliating experience, my colleague recalled her astonishment when, in response to the event, she heard old adages such as “Boys will be boys,” “They were just playing around,” “They didn’t really mean what they said,” or “It was just a bad joke.” This was the first cyber offense against a teacher at her school and administrators were at a loss as to how it should be handled by school officials and local law enforcement. In fact, the community at large was divided on how the incident should be addressed. Her humiliation and feelings of despair struck a chord with me, as I realized that every technological tool invented can be used for good or evil. A preliminary search regarding the phenomenon of cyber harassment of educators revealed that it was definitely a real issue, albeit an understudied one.

Similar media accounts, my fondness for technology, and discussions at regional job-related meetings regarding this vicious means of harassment toward educators were the driving forces that triggered my interest in this study. It is important to differentiate between harmless fun and harassment; furthermore, it is crucial to understand the potentially harmful effects of cyber harassment. It is hoped that as a result of this study, the knowledge base of cyber harassment aimed at educators will be expanded.

The researcher’s worldview is the basis for the paradigm that he or she initially selects to begin research. This necessary first step “sets down the intent, motivation, and expectations for the research” (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006, p. 2). Its identification is essential in establishing the framework for the study. In fact, Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) asserted that, “without nominating a paradigm as a first step, there is no basis for subsequent choices regarding methodology, methods, literature, or research design” (p. 2). In examining myself, and my beliefs, I find that the constructivist paradigm is the most appropriate to guide this research
study. According to the constructivist paradigm, the primary goal of research is to “seek understanding” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). The participants communicate the direct lived experiences of the phenomenon to the researcher, who seeks to develop themes and patterns (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The researcher’s role is then to understand and explain the lived experience as expressed by the participants in a way that unites the two roles so intimately that the participants are considered “co-researchers” (Moustakas, 1994, p.15).

The qualitative researcher must also acknowledge and examine the philosophical assumptions that will have implications in the practice of his or her research (Ary, et al., 2010; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). Ontological assumptions answer the question: What is the nature of reality? Reality is subjective and best represented in the words of those who have experienced the phenomenon in question. Each participant expressed himself or herself in a unique and personal way that is completely dependent upon his or her perspective (Ary, et al., 2010; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Moustakas, 1994).

Epistemological assumptions address the nature of knowing and answer the question: What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched? In order to construct knowledge, the researcher must go inside, to the greatest extent possible, the experience of each participant. This was accomplished through a focus group, in-depth interviews, and guided journal reflections (Ary, et al., 2010; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Moustakas, 1994).

Axiological assumptions clarify the role of the researcher’s values in the research. It is impossible to be completely neutral in the research process, and I did not attempt to do so. I
have been shaped by past experiences, and this affected the way I interpreted the data. Other researchers may or may not have similar findings, even if they use the same data (Ary, et al., 2010; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Moustakas, 1994).

Methodological assumptions outline the process of the research itself. Transcendental phenomenology was the most appropriate means of conducting this study because it allowed me to personally interact with participants in order to elicit their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions in order to develop a deeper meaning of the phenomenon. Researchers must see the big picture before details can be elicited and generalizations formed; furthermore, the incorporation of inductive logic necessitated using an emerging research design such as transcendental phenomenology (Ary, et al., 2010; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Moustakas, 1994).

Problem Statement

Feelings of stress are a reality in all workplaces. Educators, whether in urban, suburban, or rural settings, whether in public or private schools, are well aware of the routine stress associated with working in the education sector (Anderson & Chhiba, 2008). Stressors to those educators presently working in the public school realm include the increased focus on high-stakes testing, the pressure to meet the needs of all learners, the challenges presented by ethnic diversity, the trials of operating under budget restraints, and the difficult task of dealing with myriad parental issues (Larson, 2005; Margolis & Nagel, 2006). Job-related stress and its impact on job satisfaction have been studied for some time. It is well accepted, and understandably so, that as job stress increases, job satisfaction declines (Beam, Kim & Voakes, 2003).

A relatively new addition to the various day-to-day stressors that educators experience is
the misuse of technology against them, otherwise known as cyber harassment (Belsey, 2008; Gorder, 2008; Hinduji & Patchin, 2009; Peckham, 2008). While there is comparatively little research on the consequences of teachers’ electronic harassment per se, an understanding of the immediate and long-term effects of peer-to-peer cyberbullying and other forms of interpersonal abuse reveals the potential severity of the problem. The reality is that there are an increasing number of teachers and administrators experiencing this harmful phenomenon who lack the knowledge and skills needed to handle or cope with cyber harassment (Coloroso, 2008; Myers, McCaw, Hemphill, 2011; Shariff, 2009; Willard, 2007). This phenomenological study addressed the lack of knowledge regarding these situations of cyber harassment; moreover, through examination of the lived experiences of those who had been targets, it contributes to the understanding of its effects. Clearly, cyber harassment of educators is a phenomenon that warranted further research in an effort to give a “voice” to those who have experienced it, as well as to fill a void in the existing literature.

**Purpose Statement**

In this research study, *cyberbullying* refers to student-to-student bullying, and *cyber harassment* refers to the electronic abuse of adults either by students or an adult. The electronic abuse or cyber harassment of educators is the topic of this qualitative phenomenological research study. The purpose of this study was to elicit rural North Georgia educators’ voices regarding their cyber harassment experiences in order to develop a deeper insight of this phenomenon, its effects, and its impact on those who had experienced it.

**Significance of the Study**

This study was designed to explore one of the myriad misuses of technology. The cyber harassment of educators is a relatively new phenomenon that creates complex legal, professional,
ethical, and psychosocial issues for parents, law enforcement officials, and educators (Carucci, Overhuls, & Soures, 2011). Through an in-depth exploration of this phenomenon, this research has empirical, theoretical, and practical significance.

The act of carrying out research on the phenomenon of cyber harassment illustrates the empirical significance of the study. Although a wealth of research documents the nature of student-to-student traditional bullying as well as student-to-student cyberbullying, little attention has been paid to the phenomenon of electronic victimization of educators. The inherent unpredictability of technological advances renders research in this area particularly challenging. Therefore, it is important that research is ongoing regarding the contexts in which cyber harassment occurs, the course of action following the harassment, and the effects the phenomenon has on the individual. If school leaders, teachers, law enforcement officials, and lawmakers are better able to conceptualize cyber harassment and its impact on educators, more effective solutions to this phenomenon may be developed.

In discussing phenomenological studies, Moustakas (1994) asserted the importance of the contexts of situations by stating the following:

Phenomenology is committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses. Descriptions retain, as close as possible, the original texture of things, their phenomenal qualities, and material properties. Descriptions keep a phenomenon alive, illuminate its presence, accentuate its underlying meanings, enable the phenomenon to linger, retain its spirit, as near to its actual nature as possible. In descriptions one seeks to present in vivid and accurate terms, in complete terms, what appears in consciousness and in direct seeing – images, impressions, verbal pictures, features of heaviness, lightness; sweetness, saltiness; bitterness, sourness; openness, constrictedness; coldness,
warmth; roughness, smoothness; sense qualities of sound, touch, sight, and taste; and aesthetic properties. (p. 59)

The theoretical significance of this study lies in its contribution to those theories whose substance constitutes the study’s framework: General Strain Theory (GST), anti-authority cyber expression, and Contrapower Harassment Theory. Cyberbullying and cyber-related antisocial behavior research, which is relevant in discussions about cyber harassment, has increased in the past several years, but requires further investigation in order to be fully understood.

Technological advances have rendered educators vulnerable to abuse that would never have been thought possible in past decades. At a time when a high percentage of educators are leaving the profession (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008; Ingersoll & May, 2012), and few college students see the appeal of preparing youth to become contributing members of society (Greiner, Espinoza, & Smith, 2005; Guarino, SantibaNez, Daley, & Brewer, 2004; Whitebook & Sakai, 2003), it becomes increasingly important to understand educator experiences of being cyber harassed. Before cyber harassment concerns can be remedied and new insights considered, educators, parents, law enforcement officials, and lawmakers must acknowledge the phenomenon of cyber harassment. Stakeholders must be able to view and assess the problem of cyber harassment from the inside out, through the educators’ voices, in an effort to understand, intervene, and prevent the growing trend of educator cyber harassment (Phippen, 2011). The information gathered in this study expands a scant research base related to the phenomenon of educator cyber harassment. The practical knowledge gained from this study may be relevant in future efforts to ensure the wellbeing of educators. Addressing this violence in schools assists in making the workplace safer for employees, and therefore, improves conditions for more productive teaching and learning environments (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).
Research Questions

The following four research questions focus on the cyber harassment of educators and guided this phenomenological study:

Research Question One: According to affected rural North Georgia school district educators, what were the contexts in which the cyber harassment occurred?

Qualitative research is a strategy used to better understand a phenomenon and the goal of the researcher is to provide a “larger picture” from the many smaller “facets” of data collected (Creswell, 2009, p. 176). Creswell (2009) also suggested that the ideal location for data collection is where the participants experience the problem being studied. Circumstances of the phenomenon made this an impossible feat because the electronic abuse occurred in cyberspace, however, by focusing on the natural setting (context) of the participants’ experience before, during, and after the cyber harassment.

Research Question Two: What course of action did the rural North Georgia educators take in response to their experience(s) with cyber harassment?

Cyber harassment, especially in an educational setting, can be a complex balancing act between factors such as freedom of speech, disruption of the school environment, and varying values of those involved. Educators and law enforcement officials must determine if a school policy or law exists to protect the educator.

Research Question Three: How do rural North Georgia educators who have been cyber harassed describe the effects of the phenomenon on them?

Researchers in various studies report numerous accounts of mental physical, and social maladies that result from electronic abuse (Barack, 2010; Belsey, 2008; Boster, 2010; Coloroso,
2008, Patchin & Hinduja, 2012; Shariff, 2009). Wide arrays of consequences resulting from this anti-social behavior include decreased feelings of efficacy and social anxiety (Spindel, 2008).

**Research Question Four:** How, if at all, do rural North Georgia educators achieve resolution after experiencing cyber harassment?

Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000, 2008) posited the Self Determination Theory (SDT) as a means to explain the inherent needs people have in order to maximize their potential as individuals. The theory supports the need for people to feel competent, autonomous, and connected. If any one of these internal forces is missing, psychological disconnection may occur.

**Research Plan**

Strauss (1987) stated that qualitative research “seeks to understand human and social behavior not from the etic or outsider’s perspective, but from the emic or insider’s perspective, that is, as it is lived by the participants in a particular social setting” (p. 449). Furthermore, Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen (2007) reported that qualitative research is descriptive and uses rich details of the contextual setting to further explain a phenomenon. The essence of this study was to capture educator experiences, using rich detail of cyber harassment based on their personal accounts in order to determine commonalities and establish relevant themes based on their experiences.

A phenomenological research design is appropriate when emerging phenomena warrants further exploration or discovery through the collection of nonnumeric data such as words or pictures (Creswell, 2007; Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological research is considered “personal” and its purpose is to “portray the meaning that is constructed by the participants involved” (Ary et al., 2007, p. 420). The phenomenological approach was chosen for this study.
because gathering similar experiences from individuals is an important step in developing an understanding of the characteristics of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). This study utilized transcendental phenomenological methodology to capture participants’ interpretation concerning the phenomenon’s impact on their lives and how they made meaning of their cyber harassment experiences (Gadamer, 1989; Moustakas, 1994). It is not enough to study the phenomenon in and of itself; a richer description was achieved only by studying the meaning and holistic experiences of the participants. After all, the basic underpinning of transcendental phenomenology is to describe rather than to explain (Moustakas, 1994).

Ultimately, a qualitative, transcendental phenomenological research design, incorporating an initial brief survey, was utilized. The preliminary survey allowed for the purposeful selection of educators who have personally experienced cyber harassment. The educator participants in this study were given the opportunity to voice their cyber harassment experiences through focus group discussions, individual interviews, and guided journal reflections that provided a full and rich description of their cyber harassment experience(s) in a manner similar to that described by Moustakas (1994).

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are imposed boundaries the researcher places on the research design (Ary et al., 2010; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Creswell (2007) noted that delimitations narrow the scope of the study. This study had several delimitations. Participants were limited to all public educators in three school districts in a geographically similar rural setting in North Georgia. Finally, participants in this study must have firsthand experience with cyber harassment on at least one occasion in order to participate.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purpose of this study, the term *bullying* refers to traditional, face-to-face bullying, whether student-to-student or student-to-teacher; “cyberbullying” refers to student-to-student bullying via electronic communication tools; and “cyber harassment” refers to situations in which electronic communication tools are used to target adults. Though the cyber harassment of adults by students does not have an extensive research base, a considerable amount of attention has been paid to the traditional bullying and cyberbullying of students by other students. As the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of all three phenomena are considered to be similar, it is useful and relevant to first review literature on traditional student-to-student bullying as well as student-to-teacher bullying, and then examine the research on cyberbullying and cyber harassment simultaneously.

**Theoretical Framework**

High quality research is accomplished by using a theoretical base to guide both the collection and analysis of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This study is no exception, as it integrates several relevant theories into a framework to guide this study. Although cyberbullying and cyber harassment are relatively new phenomena, they share many commonalities with the well-researched area of traditional bullying. There were three theoretical underpinnings examined in this manuscript: General Strain Theory (GST) (Agnew, 1992), antiauthority cyber expression (Lave, Duguid & Fernandez, 1992; Shariff, 2009), and contrapower harassment theory (DeSouza & Fansler, 2003; Rospenda, Richman & Nawyn, 1998).

**General Strain Theory**

An oft-used theoretical lens through which traditional bullying is viewed can be found in a contemporary criminological theory called General Strain Theory (GST). According to GST,
individuals who experience excessive stress (strain) and, as a result, feel outraged or frustrated, are more likely to inflict pain on others through criminal or deviant behavior (Agnew, 1992). In general, bullying others, whether traditionally or electronically, could be the result of a possible scenario that occurs when youth feel stressed or strained. According to Agnew (2000) when youth feel frustrated, depressed, or anxious, there is a pressure for corrective action so that they “won’t feel so bad” (p. 109). Bullying in any form is a potential action to relieve these feelings. A bully can achieve feelings of superiority and power by belittling, harassing, teasing, or taunting someone in an effort to improve the way they feel (Olweus, 1978). Cyberbullying via electronic devices provides an excellent opportunity for youth to lash out, often with perceived anonymity and with little concern for others’ feelings or consequences for their actions (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). This is further supported in a study of college age cyber bullies and victims conducted by Schenk, Fremouw, and Keelan (2013), which noted that the prevalent negative motives given by perpetrators were anger, hatred, revenge, or jealousy.

**Antiauthority Cyber Expression**

Lave, Duguid and Fernandez (1992) reviewed sociological theories on adolescent rebellion and noted that theorists have long reported a connection between rebellious adolescent behavior and negative attitudes toward authority. These researchers expanded the scope of sociological theory and analysis and reflected that it is people’s interaction with their social class, peers, and the neighborhood community that affect their attitudes toward authority. In other words, adolescents do not merely develop resistance to authority for psychoemotional or biophysical reasons; rather, attitudes such as resistance to authority or the lack thereof are the result of social interrelationships within class and community collectives (Lave, Duguid, & Fernandez, 1992).

A conceptual underpinning linked specifically to the cyber harassment of adults in the
educational setting can be found in Shariff’s (2009) construct of antiauthority cyber expression. According to Shariff, antiauthority cyber harassment occurs when the power differential between student and educator is switched. Shariff (2009) described this expression as occurring when students use technology to demean, joke about, modify photographs, and humiliate or criticize their teachers or school administrators when they are unhappy about occurrences at school (p. 8).

In an online scenario, the power differential between student and educator is reversed, and the educator feels helpless because they have little control over who sees the online postings youth use for negative purposes, such as spreading rumors, threatening someone, or sending hurtful, shameful messages or pictures while often using an alias or fake name (Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

**Contrapower Harassment Theory**

In conceptualizing the phenomenon of teachers being bullied by students, one must acknowledge the surface power differential. Within the institution of education, there exists power that teachers possess simply due to their position as a teacher – institutional authority. In a student-to-teacher bullying situation, the balance of power is inverted as the inferior status party, the student, becomes more powerful than the superior status party, the teacher. The term “contrapower” has been applied to the phenomenon of such inverted power relationships (DeSouza & Fansler, 2003).

Traditionally, aggressive behaviors have been viewed in the context of one individual being physically inferior to another individual. Hence, the bully on the playground picks on peers with smaller physiques. The perceived form of power may be physical, social, economic, etc. In essence, contrapower models appear opposite, in that they allow individuals with less perceived power to harass or mistreat individuals who have more power or authority over them.
They believe themselves to have some type of power over authority figures because of their perceived status (Rospenda, Richman, & Nawyn, 1998). Examples include college students acting out against professors without tenure, who have lower academic rank, or who are gay (Lampman, Phelps, Bancroft, & Beneke, 2009).

**Review of the Literature**

Bullying is not new. People have bullied other people for as long as society has existed; however, prior to the 1970s, little attention was paid to the causes and effects of bullying (Olweus, 1978). Many viewed traditional, face-to-face bullying of students by other students as a rite of passage or something that “kids just do” as a part of growing up (Olweus, 1978). The work of Olweus drew attention to the detrimental psychological impact of bullying on children and teens.

Olweus (1978), a well-respected Swedish researcher in the field of bullying published several studies, books, and prevention programs/curricula since the early 1970s. *The Olweus Bully Prevention Program* has been adopted by many school systems in the United States and abroad. This particular curriculum primarily targets bullying behavior in the traditional sense but also includes cyberbullying sessions as a subtopic. Prior to Olweus’ research, many accepted bullying with a “rite of passage” or “children can be cruel” mentality. The seriousness of bullying, both traditional and cyberbullying, has been brought to light by family members of bullying victims who have committed suicide as an escape from the daily torture. One difference in traditional bullying and cyberbullying is that children and teens can often escape traditional bullying by staying home or leaving the playground. Cyberbullying, on the other hand, can be 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Other manifestations of bullying may include aggression,
antisocial behavior, depression, low self-esteem, dropping grades, drug abuse, etc. (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Olweus (2000) emphasized several of the consequences experienced by those being tormented by traditional, face-to-face bullies. The consequences include eating disorders, chronic illnesses, depression, and distress, as well as the unwillingness to attend school resulting in truancy issues. While the cyber abuse of older adolescents and adults should not be ignored, the main subjects of Olweus’ (2000) research focused on individuals under the age of 18 who are still considered to be under the watch and care of parents and educators. Since Olweus’ early research, the negative impact of bullying has been studied at great lengths in disciplines such as counseling, education, psychology, sociology, psychiatry, and criminology, which has resulted in a broad research base encompassing the many facets of bullying.

Ironically, despite this wealth of research, traditional bullying does not have an exact or precise definition; furthermore, terminology differs from author to author. Most researchers generally agree that, for bullying to have occurred, an interaction must have: (a) involved intentional negative behavior, (b) occurred repeatedly, and (c) involved maliciousness (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Olweus, 2000). Hinduja and Patchin (2009) added that the “repetitive nature of bullying creates a dynamic where the victim continuously worries about what the bully will do next” (p. 12). Olweus (1993) shed light on several of the consequences experienced by those tormented by traditional, face-to-face bullying. Serious consequences of being bullied in any form include eating disorders, chronic illnesses, school truancy, depression, feelings of loneliness, humiliation, insecurity, a genuine fear of going to school, and even suicide (Coloroso, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowlaski & Limber, 2007; Olweus, 1978, 1999, 2003; Willard, 2007). A study by Guerra, Williams and Sadek (2011) reported that young people who had been
bullied are often characterized by low self-esteem, poor school performance, and a sense of belief that being bullied is normal.

Bullying has been shown to cause serious short-term and long-term psychological effects on both those who bully and those who are bullied; these effects have been well documented (Ericson, 2001; Espelage & Swearer, 2010b; Olweus, 1978, 2000, 2011). Bullying not only serves as an antisocial indicator later in life for the perpetrator, it also leaves serious psychological effects on its survivors (Olweus, 1993, 2011; Olweus & Limber, 2010; Willard, 2007). Bullying victimization has been linked to vandalism, shoplifting, dropping out of school, drug and alcohol use, and fighting (Ericson, 2001). Researchers have questioned whether the experience of childhood bullying predicts violence, heavy drinking, and drug use later in life (Anderson et al., 2001; Erickson, 2001; Kim, Catalano, Haggerty, & Abbott, 2011). In 2011, Kim et al. published a bullying study that followed 957 young people from fifth grade to 21 years of age. Results of this study indicated that childhood bullying was markedly linked to the risk of violence, heavy drinking, and marijuana use at age 21. Study results also suggested that bullying perpetrators were more likely to “show impulsivity and be exposed to poor family management and antisocial peers” (Kim et al., 2011, p. 142).

A similar study by Olweus (2011) focused on the possibility that being a bully at school forecasts later criminality. The longitudinal study covered an eight-year period—from sixth to eighth grade to ages 16 to 24. The study’s 781 student participants represented 75% of the male population from three separate Swedish community schools. Criminal data from the National Police revealed that 55% of the male perpetrators had been convicted of one or more crimes, and 36% had been convicted of at least three crimes during the study period. Interestingly, the occurrence of crime comparison ratios for the boys in the same classrooms that were identified
as non-bullies was significantly lower than that of their counterpoints who had committed previous crimes.

The life of a student who is being bullied can be a nightmare without his or her parents or teachers even knowing that the bullying is occurring (Berthelsen & Walker, 2008; Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Tokunaga, 2010). Unfortunately, despite efforts by schools and lawmakers, bullying is still occurring and according to Kowalski and Limber (2013) occurs more frequently than cyber bullying. Olweus (1993) believes that the occurrence of bullying is under-represented because many children do not report the abuse to an adult. Possible reasons for not reporting the abuse to an adult include embarrassment, fear of retaliation by the perpetrator, or a desire to fit into a group (Hinduji & Patchin, 2007; Willard, 2007).

**The Phenomenon of Traditional Student-to-Teacher Bullying**

In recent years, international researchers have turned their attention to the victimization of teachers by their students (Chen & Astor, 2009; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; James, Lawlor, Courtney, Flynn, Henry, & Murphy, 2008). Findings indicate that numerous teachers worldwide are frequently subjected to their students’ direct and indirect bullying behaviors. McKay, Arnold, Fratzl, and Thomas (2008) conducted a survey that focused on non-physical forms of hostility and aggression, and found that 27 out of 100 college faculty members reported being bullied by students.

Kauppi and Porhola (2012) defined the bullying of teachers as “a communication process in which a teacher is repeatedly subjected, by one or more students, to interaction that he or she perceives as insulting, upsetting, or intimidating...[that] can be verbal, nonverbal, or physical in nature” (p. 399). Direct verbal forms of teacher victimization include insults, inappropriate comments, and deliberate noncompliance (DeWet, 2010; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; James et al.,
Direct nonverbal behaviors include inappropriate gestures and mocking. Direct physical forms of teacher victimization include physical aggression, sexual harassment, vandalism, and destruction of property (Chen & Astor, 2009; DeWet, 2010; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; James, et al., 2008). Interestingly, Kauppi and Porhola, (2012) found that the direct forms of bullying experienced by teachers were not unlike the type of behaviors characterizing peer-to-peer bullying. On the other hand, indirect teacher harassment differed from indirect peer-to-peer bullying, which is usually characterized by exclusion. Indirect forms of teacher victimization include spreading rumors, deliberate deception, ignoring the teacher, harming the teacher’s reputation, and repeatedly disobeying classroom rules (DeWet, 2010; James et al., 2007; Kauppi & Porhola, 2012).

The Phenomena of Cyberbullying and Cyber Harassment

Recent U.S. statistics of Internet use show that 93% of teens, ages 12 to 17, use the Internet followed by 79% of all adults, age 18 and older (Purcell, 2011). The Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project (2011) reported that 74% of all Americans have used the Internet in some fashion (Purcell, 2011). Many changes have taken place since the onset of the “technology revolution” including reduced computer size, free applications (Web 2.0), network connections (faster and often wireless), and an increase in overall affordability. Advancement in smart phones, which are actually mini computers, has had a tremendous effect on the connectivity of society.

In many cases, parents, adults, educators, and law enforcement officials lack the technological expertise and confidence that today’s youth possess naturally (Carucci, Overhuls, Soures, 2011; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Trolley & Hanel, 2010). Without a doubt, today’s young people are 21st century individuals, meaning there was never a time when technology was
not present in their lives (Prensky, 2012). Technology author Mark Prensky (2006) originally coined the term digital natives in reference to today’s youth, highlighting the divide between young people who have grown up with technology and older individuals who have become acquainted with technology. Prensky (2012) has since changed his stance and concludes that older people can be labeled digital natives as well. Regardless of what they are termed, many adults and parents often lack the expertise and confidence to utilize technology as easily as 21st century individuals (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Prensky, 2012).

A relatively new form of peer-to-peer bullying, cyberbullying, has emerged as a result of these dramatic advancements in technology. Cyberbullying is the term used when youth engage in online activities that are meant to embarrass, harass, or humiliate others, usually their peers (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2012; Tokunaga, 2010; Willard, 2007). With the advancement of technology, some view the extension of traditional bullying to bullying online as inevitable, in part because youth possess a natural inclination to technology (Coloroso, 2008; Shariff, 2008; Willard, 2007). Another factor that may affect the inclination to electronically bully or harass someone online is the decline in computer monitoring by parents or other adults. This is supported by research studies that confirm that the decrease in online supervision might lead to increased online cyberbullying of others (Kraft & Wang 2010; Walrave & Heirman, 2011).

Cyberbullying and Cyber Harassment Definitions

Definitions of cyberbullying vary depending upon the perspective taken by each researcher. There is also confusion as to the age requirements of cyber bullying and cyber harassment (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). Belsey (2010), a Canadian researcher among the first to address the phenomenon, defined cyberbullying as follows:
Cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies such as email, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal Web sites, and defamatory online personal polling Web sites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others. (para. 1)

American attorney Nancy Willard (2007) defined cyberbullying as speech that is “defamatory, constitutes bullying, harassment, or discrimination, discloses personal information, or contains offensive, vulgar or derogatory comments” (p. 1). Hinduja and Patchin (2009) defined cyberbullying as “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices” (p. 5). While all definitions are quite similar, researchers and lawmakers have yet to agree on a clear definition of cyberbullying, thus making accurate statistics regarding this phenomenon ambiguous (Carucci, Overhuls, & Soures, 2011; Sabella, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2013; Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2012). However, it is apparent that all the definitions contain three common elements: (a) use of technology, (b) intentional action, and (c) a desire to cause harm. Many terms are used to refer to bullying through electronic means including cyberbullying (sometimes written “cyber bullying”), cyber harassment, electronic bullying, e-bullying, online harassment, Internet bullying, and online social cruelty (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Tokunaga, 2010; Willard, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Aftab (2012), an attorney specializing in Internet safety and director of wiredsafety.net, described cyberbullying as occurring between minors and cyber harassment as occurring when the target of this phenomenon is an adult. Kim (2009) confirmed this definition and for the purpose of this study, cyberbullying occurs between youth or peers, and cyber harassment is used when the target is an adult regardless of the age of the perpetrator.
Menesini and Nocentini (2009) disputed that online harassment is actually a form of bullying because of the anonymous nature of the behavior and the fact that a power imbalance is difficult to pinpoint. Though far fewer research studies have examined the phenomenon of cyber harassment, it is an area of research warranting further in-depth investigation.

Cyberbullying and cyber harassment can be characterized as either direct or indirect. Direct cyberbullying and cyber harassment involve threatening or harassing someone online while using one’s true identity. An example of direct cyberbullying would be for a perpetrator to send a text or email using their own account and say mean or harassing statements with the intent to threaten, intimidate, or psychologically harm the target. Indirect cyberbullying or cyber harassment occurs when the identity of the perpetrator is not apparent (Chibbaro, 2007; Olweus, 1993). An example of indirect cyberbullying or cyber harassment would be for a perpetrator to post a slanderous or mean comment anonymously on a website.

**Means and Methods of Cyberbullying and Cyber Harassment**

Regardless of the age of the target, harassment generally occurs through two major electronic means: the Internet and mobile phones (Hinduja & Patchin, 2006; Tokunaga, 2010). On the other hand, the methods used to cyberbully students or cyber harass adults are numerous and vary greatly. Traditionally, those who bully are stronger and bigger, or have a position of authority, whether real or perceived, over those they bully (Olweus, 1978). A cyberbully or cyber harasser can inflict pain and emotional stress regardless of their physical size, popularity, social standing, age, gender, or race. The perpetrator can harass or threaten via email, list serve, cell phone text, blog, or any website, including gaming sites and chat rooms (Coloroso, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; McQuade, Dolt, & Meyer, 2009; Tokunaga, 2010; Willard, 2007; Worthen, 2007). The quality of technology makes it possible for cyberbullying or cyber
harassment to occur more conspiratorially and to disperse the message more rapidly. The increasing mobility of electronics essentially allows one to carry around a computer in one’s pocket. These devices have ushered in a new era of convenient connectivity whether one’s intent is for good or evil. The type of actions used by a perpetrator have included posting racist remarks, using photo editing tools to post pornographic photos, using a cell phone in the gym locker room to take pictures of peers, circulating false rumors, and facilitating hurtful situations such as using a website to vote on the fattest or ugliest kid in school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

**Social networking.** Social networking is not new. Traditionally, children and teens grow up with groups of friends and relatives who share interests, purpose, or have some commonality such as age, gender, or location. As adults, networking groups may branch out to groups such as professional colleagues, mothers of young children, or even individuals who share a disease. Advances in technology have changed the dynamics of social networking and made it possible to interact with others at any time and from any location in the world. Sites created specifically for this purpose are social networking sites (SNS). Boyd and Ellison (2007) interpreted SNS as:

> web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (p. 211)

Social networking users often build a community around a topic or interest through completing and sharing a profile in order to connect and interact with others with a similar profile. In this manner, social network users can become part of elaborate social networks. A social networking site, when used positively, provides a venue for sharing ideas, keeping up with friends and
relatives, and even contains possibilities for employment and opportunities for business owners. Patchin and Hinduja (2010) felt that 21st century individuals (Prensky, 2012) often lack a place to “hang out” and choose cyber space as a venue to meet and interact (Tokunaga, 2010). McQuade, Colt, and Meyer (2009) attributed the escalating usage of social networking sites in part to the increase of gasoline and food prices. Regardless of the reason for their use, social networking sites override the importance of geographic and time hurdles that might constrain or hamper a relationship (Simpson, 2012). Fraser and Dutta (2008) estimated more than 600 million users would be associated with at least one SNS by the year 2012. Facebook (2013) reported 1.06 billion worldwide regular users in their end of 2012-year report, which greatly surpasses the previous estimated number of users.

According to research, social networking sites are where a large part of cyber abuse occurs (Englander, 2010; Kwan & Skoric, 2013). Individuals post information about their friends, relatives, or teachers in a way that captivates attention and thus meets their inherent need for acceptance and endorsement (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Cheung, Chiu, and Lee (2010) asserted that Facebook®, a popular social networking site, is widely used because the site implies the presence (and communication) of others. Social presence theory addresses this need for social interaction (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Sheldon, Abad, and Hinsch (2011) used Social Determination Theory (SDT) as a lens with which to investigate the motives behind the use of Facebook®. According to SDT, “human nature contains three inherent psychological needs, experiential nutriments people must have if they are to thrive and mature to the maximal extent” (Sheldon, Abad, & Hinsch, 2011, p. 2). These include autonomy, competency, and relatedness.
An explanation for why some people post inappropriate content on social networking sites is what Suler (2004) called the disinhibition effect. He used this term to describe how people “say and do things in cyberspace that they wouldn’t ordinarily say and do in the face-to-face world” (p. 321). Suler further differentiated between benign disinhibition and toxic disinhibition. Benign disinhibition describes the phenomenon of people sharing very personal things about themselves, such as their secret hopes, dreams, and fears, seemingly private things that would not be shared in person, but are over the Internet. Toxic disinhibition, on the other hand, leads to negative behaviors that people wouldn’t engage in face-to-face, including “rude language, harsh criticisms, anger, hatred, even threats” (Suler, 2004, p. 321).

Suler (2004) hypothesized that at least six factors are involved in general online disinhibition, leading to a “weakening of the psychological barriers that block hidden feelings and needs” (p. 322). These include dissociative anonymity (You don’t know me.), invisibility (You can’t see me.), asynchronicity (See you later.), solipsistic introjection (It’s all in my head.), dissociative imagination (It’s just a game.), and minimization of status and authority (We’re equals.) (pp. 322-324). According to Lapidot-Lefler and Barak (2012), the factors primarily associated with toxic disinhibition include anonymity, invisibility, and lack of eye-contact. Willard (2007) explained that disinhibition occurs when people feel free to express themselves online without any perceived consequences.

**Cell phones and text messages.** Cell phones and text messages are also used to bully and harass. The Pew Internet & American Life Project (2012) reported that 55% of adults use their mobile phone for accessing the Internet and sending emails and text messages, a percentage that increased 31% from 2009. Surpassing adult use of mobile phones are teens, with 88% of teens texting daily (Pew Internet & Life Project, 2012). McQuade et al. (2009) cited increasing
ownership to decreasing costs, ease of use, and miniaturization of the devices. Modern cell phones, called “smart phones,” are virtually small computers that allow users to perform the same tasks on their phone as they once did using their computer. The mobile nature of today’s devices allows uploading, downloading, sending, or receiving cyber messages virtually anywhere.

Text messaging can be a beneficial and efficient means of communication in many different situations. For example, texts between parents and children—providing logistical information regarding whereabouts, pick up times, and reminders—can eliminate possible miscommunications and give peace of mind to each. Text messaging used by a group of perpetrators who conspire to bombard a target’s phone, is called text wars (Shariff, 2009; Willard, 2007). Texting negative or harassment comments are examples of cyber abuse meant to harass, insult, embarrass, or cause harm (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). As a cell phone is also a digital camera, embarrassing or upsetting photographs and video can accompany text messages between perpetrators and targets (Coloroso, 2008; Shariff, 2009).

Websites and blogs. The construction of websites and blogs has become increasingly simplified, and they are usually free for anyone with an email address. Pre-made websites such as ratemyteachers.com©, ratemyprofessors.com©, or teachercomplaints.com© are examples of free websites, open to anyone wishing to post a factual, informational comment pertaining to a particular professor or teacher. However, they are often subject to slanderous or untrue statements about an educator with the express purpose of embarrassing or harassing them (Harris, 2011). Whether the insults or embarrassing language is on a pre-made website or blog or on a website or blog constructed by the student, the language used is termed by Shariff (2008) as being “anti-authority cyber expression” (p. 8). Examples of this expression include making
jokes and humiliating statements about authority figures, describing principals as pedophiles, posting unflattering photographs with insults, and discussing the sexual orientation, hygiene, or teaching styles of teachers (Shariff, 2008).

**Email.** Electronic mail (email) is a way of electronically exchanging text and graphics via a computer or smart phone and has become the tool of choice for many internal and external communication exchanges. Online email accounts are easy to establish with very little effort, but Conn (2004) warned that many students and adults “erroneously believe that the anonymity of the Internet protects them” (p. 129). Negative conations involving electronic email abuse include writing disrespectful remarks, making fun of someone, threatening someone, making cruel statements, and spreading untruthful rumors, all meant for harm and harassment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Shariff, 2009; Tokunaga, 2010; Trolley & Hanel, 2010). Two specific categories of emails meant for harm are flame mail, “meant to enrage and provoke readers,” and hate mail, “outright expressions of hatred” (Conn, 2004, p. 165). In a study of 100 college faculty members in 2008, 44% had received distressing emails from students they viewed as interpersonal mistreatment.

**Impersonation.** Impersonation or masquerading occurs when a second party obtains the password of an email account, SNS, website, or any electronic gateway of another, either with or without their knowledge or consent. Passwords may be exchanged between pre-teen or teenage girls as a symbol of true friendship (Willard, 2007). Obtaining others’ passwords is a way to obtain access to email or webpage accounts to post or send information that looks as though it is coming from the owner of the account. An example of this method of cyberbullying or cyber harassment would be when a student accesses someone else’s email account and sends an inappropriate or threatening message to a teacher or administrator.
**Outing and trickery.** Another method of cyberbullying and cyber harassment includes outing and/or trickery, and these two are often accomplished together (Shariff, 2009). Outing occurs when the perpetrator obtains some specific intimate information from a target and then forwards or publicly posts the information to embarrass or humiliate the target. Trickery can also occur as part of outing. An innocent target is deceived into thinking the images being transmitted or the conversation being held is private but is in fact disseminated to others. The nature of the Internet offers a vast audience and makes it possible for one to disseminate information to millions of people around the world.

**Exclusion.** Exclusion can also be used in electronic harassment situations. An example of exclusion is not being able to participate in an online game or perhaps not being on a buddy or friend list. All humans possess a basic need for a sense of belonging, and Willard (2007) commented that the emotional impact of exclusion can be intense and that tribal exclusion or religious excommunication is considered the “ultimate punishment” (Maslow, 1954, p. 10).

**Cyberbaiting.** Another type of cyber harassment endured by educators is called cyberbaiting (Norton, 2011; Shariff, 2008). Students conspire to misbehave with the intention of provoking a frustrated teacher to lose his or her temper. Other students then film the irate, enraged adult with a mobile device. The video footage, sound wave, or both, is then uploaded to a website or a free video storage site such as YouTube©. The Norton Online Family Report (2011) found that 21% of teachers surveyed ($N = 2,379$) experienced this phenomenon personally or knew a colleague who had experienced cyberbaiting. Understandably, such a video might cause personal, professional, and school embarrassment, as well as notable disruption to the classroom environment.
Cyberstalking. A particularly disturbing means of cyberbullying or cyber harassment is called cyberstalking. This method involves online activities that can make a person fearful for his or her well-being (Willard, 2007). Trolley and Hanel (2010) referred to this method of electronic bullying as being more serious in nature, especially if the victim feels some type of threat or impending harm.

Direct threats and distressing material. Closely related to cyberstalking is cyberthreatening, and this method can be subdivided into direct threats and distressing material. Direct threats are statements by a perpetrator about an actual planned event with the intention to hurt someone or hurt him/herself, specifically, threatening to commit suicide. Distressing material is not as direct and usually hints that the perpetrator is considering hurting someone by making a vague threat to do so. An example of distressing material is for the perpetrator to warn a potential victim, such as, “Watch out, I am going to get you” (Willard, 2007).

Factors Associated with Cyberbullying and Cyber Harassment

Researchers have attempted to characterize perpetrators and victims by searching for commonalities; however, they have not yet come to an agreed upon conclusion. Factors examined include gender, perceived anonymity, infinite audience, prevalence, and effects.

Gender. Researchers differ on whether gender plays a role in predicting cyberbullying and cyber harassment. Topics of discord include the discussion of which gender is more likely to be the victim of cyberbullying or cyber harassment and which gender is more likely to be the perpetrator of the electronic abuse (Tokunaga, 2010). These are among the questions researchers have asked themselves, yet their findings remain another source of disparity. Researchers Hinduja and Patchin (2007), Kowalski and Limber (2007), Williams and Guerra (2007), and
Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) are among those who have reported finding no gender differences in the overall perpetration of cyberbullying or cyber harassment.

A study conducted in Toronto by Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Daciuk, and Solomon (2010) reported that 99% (N = 2,164) of the middle and high school participants had a working computer in their home, capable of accessing the Internet. They also reported that 98% of the participants used the computer for at least one hour daily. Results of their study showed there was no difference among girls and boys in the rate of occurrence of being cyberbullied in the middle school grades. Likewise, other findings claimed that girls and boys of middle school age were equally likely to have cyberbullied or cyber harassed another person (Mishna et al., 2010). Older girls, in grades 10 and 11, were more likely to be cyberbullied than older boys.

Berson, Berson, and Ferron (2002) used an online survey to gather information about online risks for 10,800 adolescent (age 12-18 years) girls. The results of the 19 multiple choice and open-ended questionnaire were divided into three categories: (a) online habits, (b) supervision of online activities, and (c) patterns of interaction online. Almost 25% of the girls reported being online six to nine hours per day, with 12% spending 10 to 12 hours online per day. The girls reported that their home computer was their primary access site, and 58% spent their time online emailing and instant-messaging friends, 20% were randomly surfing the Web, and 16% spent the majority of their time online in chat rooms (Berson et al., 2002). Regarding supervision, the study reported that 70% of the participants’ parents had discussed cyber safety and 35% reported that teachers had discussed cyber safety. Also, 15% of the girls reported receiving communication that disturbed them, and 3% stated they had originated menacing or sexually explicit messages. All in all, these staggering results confirmed that a noteworthy number of adolescent females were involved in risky online activities that may be associated
with portentous behavior. The researchers also noted that the more time the adolescent girls spent online, the more likely they were to participate in destructive or dangerous acts (Berson et al., 2002). The study provided an early framework for better understanding youth’s cyber activities, especially adolescent females.

Information from a recent large-scale Canadian study \((N = 2186)\) by Mishna et al. (2010) provided insight on how the methods used to cyberbully may be influenced by gender. Girls of all ages and grade levels were more likely than boys to have been called names and victimized by gossip. Males were more likely than girls to have been threatened online while girls in all grades were more likely to have had false rumors spread about them. The older females in the study were more likely to have had someone send them distressing sexual photos or text, to have been solicited to do something sexual online, and to have their private photos dispersed online without their permission (Mishna et al., 2010).

Likewise, some researchers have pointed out that text-based cyberbullying and cyber harassment is more prevalent in females (Anderson & Sturm 2007; Willard, 2007). Hinduja and Patchin (2009) purported that cyberbullying is more prevalent in females because girls tend to be more verbal than males. Research studies attempting to predict cyberbullying perpetrators or cyberbullying survivors report inconsistent findings. Some studies found that males were more likely to be perpetrators of cyberbullying than females (Aricak, 2009; Aricak et al., 2008; Shariff, 2009). On the other hand, Li (2006) argued that more male students reported being cyberbullies than female students. Other researchers, however, have found no significant differences in cyberbullying based on gender (Arick, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

**Perceived anonymity.** There are two common misconceptions about the Internet thought to be foundational factors when individuals perform actions on the Internet that they
might never do in the tangible world. They are the perception of anonymity and being invisible. In fact, Brydolf (2007) called the perceived “You can’t see me and I can’t see you” anonymity the most prominent facet of cyberbullying. In reality, people are never really invisible on the Internet because online activities can almost always be traced. Unfortunately, these misperceptions can serve to remove fear or concerns about disapproval or punishment (Willard, 2007).

When the word bullying is mentioned in conversation, one might mentally picture a larger youth pushing or harassing a youth smaller in stature. That mental picture might not be an accurate representation of cyberbullying. Based on the perceived anonymity of the Internet, the youth smaller in stature may feel empowered to strike back toward the larger youth by building a website that makes fun of the larger youth who physically harms him or her. The overall anonymous nature of cyberspace is especially appealing to young people. The perceived anonymity of the Internet can allow people to engage in conduct they might otherwise not be willing to act upon (Agatston, 2008, Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

Researchers noted that the perceived anonymity of the Internet is dangerous for young people who might not normally verbalize or act out aggressive modes of behavior. Individuals may feel shielded by not being face-to-face with the victim, which often results in creating extreme emotional distress (Kwolaski & Limber, 2007). Many find it easier to cyberbully others than to bully them in person. It is easier and less confrontational to type a derogatory, hurtful comment to someone online than to make those same comments in person. When someone says something injurious face-to-face, the exchange visually produces body language, and the perpetrator knows the effect of the words immediately. The lack of tangible feedback via an Internet comment interferes with empathy, and the lack of swift response leads to the
misperception that no harm has resulted from the cyberbullying (Agatson, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Willard, 2007). Overall, young people view cyberbullying as safer than traditional bullying. Because it appears to be anonymous, they feel that they are less likely to get caught and that it is easier because there are no face-to-face confrontations (Agatston, 2008; Kowalski & Limber 2007). An anonymous behavior can occur in the form of impersonating someone else or constructing a completely fictional person using a fictional name. Due in part to the perceived anonymity, it is becoming clear that people are becoming more aggressive in online communication (Agatston, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Shariff, 2009; Willard, 2007).

**Infinite audience.** Traditional bullying usually consists of the perpetrator and the victim and possibly several onlookers. The embarrassment or humiliation that is often felt by the victim is short-lived and usually confined to peer groups, classrooms, grades or, at most, to the school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). In cases of cyberbullying, wounding or harmful content can be sent to a massive number of people in an abbreviated period of time. Therefore, online technology broadens the audience to an infinite capacity, and there is always a virtual copy of the threat, harassment, embarrassing picture, or any media meant to inflict harm (Shariff, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). User-friendly cell phones and Web presences such as blogs and Facebook© make sending both positive and inappropriate comments and text a simple process. Cyberbullying has the potential to impact individuals 24 hours a day, as well reach an infinite audience.

**Prevalence and Effects Of Cyber Abuse**

Media reports and quantitative research confirmed the increased prevalence rates as well as the detrimental social and mental effects of cyber abuse behavior (Agatston, 2008; Hinduja &
Patchin, 2009; Kwolaski & Limber, 2007, 2012; Shariff, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). The media attention and research has focused largely on student, peer-to-peer, cyberbullying.

**Peer-to-peer cyberbullying.** The prevalence of peer-to-peer cyberbullying has been extensively studied for the past 10 years, and researchers agree that the occurrence of this antisocial behavior has increased (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2012; Sabella, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2013; Shariff, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). This increased prevalence may be due in part to the lower cost of electronics and more availability of technology resources (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Researchers also agree that cyberbullying is likely under reported (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Tokunaga, 2010) and offer many possible reasons for victims’ reluctance to alert others. In some cases, victims may fear retaliation or believe that telling an adult will not solve the problem. Kowalski, Limber, and Agatston (2007) reported that one reason for the under reporting of cyberbullying is that students feel that their parents or other adults are not “tech savvy” enough to know how to help, leaving children feeling unprepared and unprotected. Quing Li (2007) conducted a cyberbullying research study and reported that only 34.1% \((n = 177)\) of those cyberbullied reported the occurrence to an adult. Similarly, 50% of the students reported knowing someone who had been cyberbullied, but only 34.1% of the survivors had reported the incident to an adult. Willard (2007) asserted, “When a young person is the target of cyberbullying by proxy, it can seem like everyone has turned into an enemy” (p. 48). Traditional bullying, when one is humiliated or belittled in front of his or her peers is horrible and embarrassing; such humiliation is often multiplied by hundreds or thousands when posted on the World Wide Web.

Coloroso (2008) gave the following reasons cyberbullying is often suspected of not being reported:
• They are ashamed of being bullied;
• They are afraid of retaliations if they tell an adult;
• They do not think anyone can help them;
• They do not think anyone will help them;
• They have bought into the lie that bullying is a necessary part of growing up;
• They may believe that adults are part of the lie, since it is not only kids who are bullying them; and
• They have learned that ‘ratting’ on a peer is bad, not cool, ‘juvenile’ – even if that peer is bullying them. (pp. 49-50)

Researchers agree that the impact of electronic harassment on all persons is detrimental and could potentially result in health concerns, reduced self-esteem, and mental and physical maladies (Coloroso, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2012; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008; Sabella, et al, 2013; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012; Shariff, 2009; Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2012). The negative outcomes associated with the aftermath of being electronically bullied range from mild emotional distress to suicidal thoughts and actions (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Numerous news reports have surfaced stemming from peer-to-peer cyberbullying incidents in which children have tragically taken their own lives or the lives of others. Many of these instances have occurred in retaliation or response to the constant abuse they have suffered for extended periods of time. Samplings of widely publicized suicides as the result of cyberbullying victimization include Ryan Halligan in 2003, Megan Meier in 2006, and Tyler Clementi in 2010. Ryan Halligan tragically committed suicide at age 13 after he was repeatedly bullied at school and online. Halligan repeatedly received harassing, insulting, and threatening instant messages
accusing him of being gay (Ryan’s Story Presentation, 2012). In a similar incident, Tyler Clementi ended his life after a sexual encounter with a male in his college dorm room was filmed and distributed on the Internet without his consent (Spaulding, 2010). Another victim of cyberbullying, Megan Meier, hung herself three weeks before her 14th birthday. The mother of a rival female peer of Meier’s fabricated a social networking account online and then posed as a boy in her class wanting to go out with her. The fiasco ended in humiliation and the untimely death of Megan (Megan Meier’s Story, 2012). In an effort to curb this anti-social behavior, many surveys and research studies are being conducted to explore technology use and cyberbullying issues affecting our nation’s youth.

**Student-to-teacher cyber harassment.** Educators have historically dealt with traditional peer-to-peer bullying and, in recent years, have had to come to terms with peer-to-peer cyberbullying. However, the same means and methods of abuse aimed at students’ peers can also be used to target adults, specifically educators. Determining the prevalence of educator cyber harassment is even more challenging than determining the prevalence of peer-to-peer cyberbullying.

Researchers theorize that many of the same issues of under-reportance come into play regarding the self-reporting of cyber harassment (Coloroso, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008; Shariff, 2009). In schools, traditionally appropriate routes of dealing with conflict or dissatisfaction with the school, such as face-to-face meetings or teacher and administrator meetings, are rapidly being replaced with negative electronic postings on public websites and forums (Kim, 2009). The difference lies in the fact that millions of people are able to access information that is often made up and the sole intent is to “destroy someone’s reputation, prevent them from obtaining work in the future, or cause the destruction
of their family life, [and] the results [can] likely be far more serious” (Spindel, 2008, p. 13). Kim (2009) proclaimed that the consequences of abusive language in today’s technological advanced society “have different dimensions” (p. 5) that are much more detrimental than in the past. A recent United Kingdom study (Phippen, 2011) revealed that 35% of the educators reported they or a colleague had been a victim of electronic abuse by students, parents, or other staff members. Educators were more likely to be electronically harassed by students (72% of occurrences), followed by parents (26%), and other staff members (12%).

Numerous accounts of educators being electronically harassed can be found in the media. For example, in 2007, 19 Toronto high school students were suspended after creating a page on a popular social networking site to discuss the merits of their principal. The discussion went further than general discussion and included extreme profanity and an explicit sexual graphic description related to the principal that the school board ruled demeaning, derogatory, and defamatory (O’Regan, 2007). In a similar example of cyber harassment of educators, a middle school principal in Pennsylvania saw his photo online with the label of “hairy sex addict” and “pervert” with a penchant for “hitting on students” (Savage, 2012).

The Internet and electronic communication, such as cell phones, is viewed by youth today as being critical tools for their social lives; as such, they may not be utilizing technology solely as a helpful tool to aid with homework as many parents may think (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008, p. 2). Recent studies have confirmed that students use the Internet with limited supervision. A Toronto study (2009) found that 46% of students surveyed used the Internet in the seclusion of their bedroom. Another Canadian survey study called Young Canadians in a Wired World (YCWW, 2009), reported on the degree to which parents knew about the websites their children visited. Thirty-eight percent of students reported that their parents knew nothing
or very little about the sites they visited or what they do on the computer. However, in the same study, 71% of the parents reported they knew quite a bit about the sites their children visited and what they did on the computer. Today’s youth may lack the supervision needed to curtail anti-social activities committed online against their peers as well as school employees.

Psychological harassment is a term that may be used interchangeably with other common terms like workplace bullying, personal harassment, and cyber harassment, but all represent varying forms of psychological warfare. When the bullying or harassment occurs at the place of work, it is defined by the Workplace Bullying and Trauma Institute (2013) as “repeated, health-impairing mistreatment of one or more persons” (para.1). Certainly, the psychological repercussions of being cyber harassed are present long after the occurrence, as the abuse is played over and over in the educator’s mind. The post punitive measures prescribed to perpetrators of harassment are inadequate; the damage is already done (Schutz & Pekrun, 2007). The Talmud alludes to this by saying, “You can kill a person only once, but when you humiliate him, you kill him many times over.” Proverbs 18:21 (New International Version) emphasize the results of hurtful words by saying, “The tongue has the power of life and death.”

Acts of cyber abuse against educators by their students affects them deeply. One hypothesized reason educators feel as they do is their strong commitment to their work and a passion for their profession (Parsons, 2005). Ostroff (1992) reported that teacher satisfaction and commitment could predict student dropout, attendance, and disciplinary problems. Educators believe in the goals of the organization and are mindful of their reputation. They often do not understand the complex reality of their situation. Following the unpleasant experience of harassment, health impairment begins; they experience feelings of confusion, isolation, and paranoia. Because of the threat of possible constant danger, educators have been known to
isolate themselves, experience emotions of embarrassment, fear, shame, anger, guilt, disgrace, anxiety, and feelings of incompetence (Schutz & Pekren, 2007). They may make a change in their formal reasoning and ways of communicating, becoming defensive and thus impacting their behavior and self-control. There are other repercussions of cyber harassment: reduction in quality and quantity of work; unpleasant employee relations, including breakdown of communications and teamwork; increased sick leave; loss of reputation and credibility; and cost of consultants, unemployment insurance claims, workers compensation or disability, occupational stress claims, settlement, and litigation. As a result, extreme physical and/or psychological episodes occur, such as severe depression, panic attacks, heart attacks, other severe illnesses, accidents, suicide attempts, and violence directed toward others. When educators can no longer endure the repercussions of cyber harassment coupled with various other stressors such as excessive workload, high stakes accountability, and lack of support by administrators, they may leave the profession (Guarino, Santibañez, Daley, & Brewer, 2004; Shernoff, Mehta, Atkins, Torf, & Spencer, 2011).

Further, educators enduring emotional and psychological abuse in the workplace have led to higher attrition rates in the profession. According to Hughes (2001), the educational setting or context is an emotional place, and sentiments have the capacity to affect teaching and learning either positively or negatively. As a means of coping with the negative emotions brought on by constantly reliving the harassment, a possible strategy of escape from the profession is the last resort for educators (Schutz & Pekrun, 2007). Analogously, other research studies have also identified anger, anxiety, and subjective stress as factors influencing teachers’ decision to quit the profession (Wilhelm, Dewhurst-Savellis, & Parker, 2000; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Hinduja and Patchin (2012) reported a strong relationship between school climate and electronic
online abuse. They feel that a strong, positive school atmosphere helps to alleviate anti-social behaviors such as cyberbullying and cyber harassment. The importance of a positive school climate on student behavior and teacher satisfaction was reinforced by Cohen, Pickeral, and McCloskey (2009).

**Educator Cyber Harassment and the Legal System**

Lawmakers have struggled to address the legal implications of wrongdoing in cyberspace. School and law enforcement officials must respect the Constitutional right to freedom of expression while providing safe schools. Before a legal discussion of cyber harassment can occur, one must examine and consider the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which includes the right to freely express one’s opinions, otherwise known as “freedom of speech.” While freedom of speech is a right in this country, it does not mean that one can say anything they want in cyberspace without consequences. The First Amendment provides protection only for speech that is “reasonable under the circumstances” (Jacobs, 2010, p. 8). In 1997, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Internet is protected by the First Amendment (Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union, 2007).

**Free speech.** In a 2012 decision, the United States Supreme Court declined to reverse original rulings in two Pennsylvania 3rd Circuit Courts involving student online abuse against two principals. In the Blue Mountain School District v. Snyder (No. 11-502) case, the court ruled that school authorities could not punish a middle school student when they ridiculed their principal online. In 2007, the student created a fake account on MySpace© and portrayed the principal as a sex addict and a pedophile. The court’s response was that the speech took place off campus and did not disrupt the school environment. Additionally, the court remarked that the
information about the principal on the MySpace© account was presented in such a manner that no one could have taken it seriously.

The second court decision, Layshock v. Hermitage School District, that was upheld, occurred in 2005 when a high school student created a fake MySpace© account and similarly, portrayed his principal in a falsely negative manner. Again, the court’s decision to uphold the original decision was the protection of the student’s First Amendment right to free speech; moreover, they reasoned, the account was created off campus and did not create a substantial disruption in the school (Walsh, 2012).

Comparatively, another piece to the legal puzzle of abusive online speech is section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (1996), which provides immunity to website sponsors for the content posted by others and no incentive for immediate removal of offensive content (Kim, 2009). The emotional distress and professional reputation of the victim expands exponentially while the survivors and authorities attempt to disassemble the offensive comments or the website itself (Kim, 2009; Li, 2007). Li (2007) added that it is difficult to take down a website, and there are essentially few rules governing what can be posted on the Internet.

**Laws.** As of this writing, most states have laws prohibiting cyberbullying as indicated in Appendix A (National Conference State Legislatures, 2011). In some states, lawmakers are still in the process of authoring laws specifically aimed at cyberbullying. Some state lawmakers are urging local school systems to expand their bullying policies, many already in place, to specifically address electronic bullying as well. Lawmakers are also suggesting, and in some cases insisting, that schools promote Internet safety education or provide curricula that covers cyberbullying prevention and education (Social Safety, 2011).
The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) is an entity that serves state legislators and their staffs by providing comparative information on current issues and research. Its website (www.ncsl.org) shows that many states have enacted cyberstalking, cyberharrassment, or cyberbullying laws that specifically pinpoint electronic bullying either by themselves or in conjunction with traditional stalking or harassment laws (Appendix 1). The NCSL guide divides electronic bullying into three separate catagories: cyberstalking, cyberharassment, and cyberbullying. NCSL defines cyberstalking as using electronic communications to stalk with a pattern of malicious or threatening behaviors. Cyber harassment, on the other hand, is harassment via an electronic device that does not involve a credible threat of harm. In this reference for state officials, cyberbullying refers only to minors within a school context. The NCSL recommends that it become the norm for school districts to establish and enforce cyberbullying policies at a local level and generally include sanctions against any form of cyberbullying on school property, including school buses and school functions (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2011).

Meanwhile, some states have extended sanctions to include cyberbullying activities that originate off-campus, with the belief that the psychological effects of cyberbullying can carry over to the school day and have a disruptive effect on youths’ learning environment. At the time of writing, 16 states have yet to enact specific cyberbullying laws for minors, according to NCSL (2011): Connecticut, Hawaii, Indiana, Maine, Michigan, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

State cyberbullying laws are in place to protect students from others’ hurtful behaviors online. North Carolina has enacted a law, the School Violence Protection Law of 2012, whose sole purpose is to protect educators against online abuse. In July 2012, North Carolina was the
first state to enact such a law and has made online abuse aimed with the intent to intimidate or torment a school employee a crime.

**Summary**

Although research conducted by important thinkers, researchers, and experts has advanced understanding of cyberbullying and cyber harassment, the coherent conceptualization of these mutations of traditional bullying is still in its genesis. In fact, a finite definition of these phenomena has yet to be claimed. Educational researchers have confirmed a link between effective teachers and increased student achievement (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Stronge, 2002; Tucker & Stronge, 2005). Cyberbullying and cyber harassment have a negative impact not only on those who are targeted but also on the learning environment and education as a whole (Colorso, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski et al., 2008; Worthen, 2008).

Without a doubt, the younger generation’s technological prowess, coupled with the easy and frequent access they have to cell phones, computers, and the Internet, creates a need for more research on the causes, impact, and prevention of this phenomenon (Prensky, 2012). The illusion of anonymity, the lack of confrontation required, and the ease of access the younger generation has to the various modes used in carrying out these acts against other students and educators can all be contributing factors leading to instances of cyberbullying and cyber harassment in its sundry forms. A thorough examination of the existing literature exposed a gap regarding the articulation of rural North Georgia public school educators’ voices regarding their cyber harassment experiences. This study will contribute to the literature by richly describing the phenomenon from their perspectives.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to listen to educators’ voices regarding their cyber harassment experiences in order to develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, its effects, and its impact on those who have experienced it. This chapter outlines the methodology employed to carry out this transcendental phenomenological study, including design rationale, research questions, participant information, setting, research procedures, researcher’s role, and a description of data collection and data analysis procedures.

Design

It is appropriate to conduct qualitative research when there is a problem or issue that needs further explanation in an effort to hear “silenced voices” and lived experiences of study participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Qualitative research is sometimes called naturalistic inquiry, and its aim is not verification of a predetermined idea, but discovery that leads to new insights (Creswell, 2007; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1994). This qualitative study employed a transcendental phenomenological research design that portrayed a phenomenon in its natural setting, gave voice and relayed meaning through interaction with the participants in the study.

The nature of the research questions in this study indicated that a phenomenological approach was most appropriate. Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences and is used to capture the voices of the participants (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000; Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology began in Germany in the 1890s with the philosophical reflections of Edmund Husserl and was later refined by Clark Moustakas (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1990). Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) described phenomenology as being “intimately connected” with the phenomena being studied and as the “antithesis of quantitative research,” in which researchers...
“detach themselves from the phenomena being studied” through objective methods of data collection and analysis (p. 495). Researchers are themselves the instrument for data collection and analysis through observing, participating, and interviewing. Phenomenological research, as Van Manen (1990) suggested, is an immersion into others’ phenomenon as they interpret it:

The point of phenomenological research is to borrow other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience. (p. 62)

Several approaches to phenomenology exist, but the one chosen for this research study was transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology, also known as empirical or psychological phenomenology, emphasizes meaning, “explicates the essences of human experience” (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p. 2), and focuses on the wholeness of experience. This method is a process of research that seeks to arrive at the meaning of a phenomenon after putting aside, or bracketing, any bias or preconceived notions and suppositions related to the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas referred to this process of a researcher putting aside assumptions as *epoche* and described the necessity of him/her seeing the phenomenon “freshly, as for the first time” (p. 34). The transcendental approach was appropriate because I was seeking to understand how educators had experienced cyber harassment.

Through this methodology, I captured, as accurately as possible, the voices of educators who had experienced cyber harassment. The only way that one person can possibly understand the experience of another person is to experience a phenomenon as directly as possible for him or herself. When this is not possible, a direct immersion into the phenomenon with the participant
through data collection procedures is warranted. Van Manen (1990) asserted that phenomenology “does not problem solve” (p. 23). Therefore, there is no right or wrong, winning or losing, correct or incorrect answers to the research questions in this study. In-depth individual interviews, a focus group interview, and guided journal reflections were as close as I could come to sharing this lived experience of cyber harassment with the educator participants in this study.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this qualitative phenomenological study.

**Research Question One:** According to affected rural North Georgia school district educators, what were the contexts in which the cyber harassment occurred?

**Research Question Two:** What course of action did the rural North Georgia educators take in response to their experience(s) with cyber harassment?

**Research Question Three:** How do rural North Georgia educators who have been cyber harassed describe the effects of the phenomenon on them?

**Research Question Four:** How, if at all, do rural North Georgia educators achieve resolution after experiencing cyber harassment?

**Setting**

Rural areas are often perceived to be idyllic places, untouched by the challenges commonly associated with schools in urban settings. North Georgia, in particular, is commonly portrayed as being socially and geographically isolated. The Appalachian Region Commission (ARC) describes the North Georgia geographic area as following the Appalachian Mountain chain. Georgia is one of the 13 eastern states to have counties in the Appalachian region. However, rural schools are not immune to potentially harmful circumstances. Technology has permitted many aspects of communication that have historically been bound by geographical and
cultural factors (Cole, 2010; Collins & Halverson, 2009; Coloroso, 2008; Hancock, 2001; Myers et al., 2011). In fact, technological advances have equalized the chances that educators in rural schools will experience an additional source of stress in the form of cyber harassment. Electronic harassment aimed at any educator via a cell phone or computer is an unfamiliar stressor that can be shocking and discomforting and can happen anywhere and at any time (Belsey, 2008; Coloroso, 2007; Hinduji & Patchin, 2011, Myers et al., 2011; Shariff, 2009).

The setting for this study included three geographically and demographically similar rural school districts in Northeast Georgia. In 2013, the districts’ 15 individual public schools had a total of 795 educators serving a student population of approximately 10,000 students in grades K-12 (Georgia Department of Education, 2012; Wolfram|Alpha knowledgebase, 2012). These school districts are primarily rural, all with high poverty rates and are located in North Georgia in the southeastern United States (Wolfram|Alpha knowledgebase, 2012). For the purpose of this study, the three demographically similar districts are labeled District A, District B, and District C. The primary reason for choosing three school districts was to increase the sampling frame, thus ensuring the recruitment of participants possessing in depth personal experience with the phenomenon being studied. The overall purpose of qualitative sampling is to describe a particular phenomenon in detail, not to generalize to a particular population or setting. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006), “representativeness is secondary to the participants’ ability to provide the desired information about self and setting” (p. 114).

Purposive sampling was the mode of sampling used in this study. The three school districts were chosen because I was made aware of numerous incidents of cyber harassment that had occurred in these districts through professional networking at various regional meetings.

**District A**
District A is comprised of 5 schools, 235 educators (Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2011), and approximately 2,600 students (Georgia Dept. of Education, 2012). District A consists of one primary, one elementary, one middle, and one high school, as well as one small K-12 consolidated school. District A has a total county population of 21,356 people with ethnicity percentages as follows: White, 97.3; African American, 1.5; Other, 0.3; Two or more races, 0.6; Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.1; Asian, 0.1; Hispanic 2.7 (Wolfram|Alpha knowledgebase, 2013). District A has an estimated yearly county population growth of 2.35% (Wolfram|Alpha knowledgebase, 2013).

District B

District B is comprised of 4 schools, 93 educators (Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2011) and approximately 1,250 students (Georgia Dept. of Education, 2012). District B consists of one elementary, one middle, and one high school. District B has a total county population of 10,471 people with ethnicity percentages as follows: White, 96.8; African American, 1.0; Other, 1.0; Two or more races, 0.7; Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0; Asian, 0.2; Hispanic 1.7 (Wolfram|Alpha knowledgebase, 2013). District B has an estimated yearly county population growth of 1.24% (Wolfram|Alpha knowledgebase, 2013).

District C

District C is comprised of 5 schools, 232 educators (Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2011), and approximately 3,450 students (Georgia Dept. of Education, 2012). District C consists of three elementary, one middle, and one high school. District C has a total county population of 23,682 people with ethnicity percentages as follows: White, 96.8; African American, 0.6; Other, 0.5; Two or more races, 0.9; Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.04; Asian, 0.2; Hispanic 1.7 (Wolfram|Alpha knowledgebase, 2013). School C has an estimated yearly county population growth of 1.24% (Wolfram|Alpha knowledgebase, 2013).
population growth of 1.96% (Wolfram|Alpha knowledgebase, 2013). Table 1 shows a summary of the three Northeast Georgia schools used in this study.

Table 1

*County and School Demographics*

**County Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Population Growth</th>
<th>County Population</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Other 2 or More Races</th>
<th>Hawaiian or Pacific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District A</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>21,356</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District B</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>10,471</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District C</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>23,682</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Wolfram/Alpha Knowledge Base, 2013)

**School Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Educators</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>2600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>1250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>3018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Georgia Department of Education, 2012)
(Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2011)

**Participants**

In phenomenological studies, researchers and participants are so dependent on one another that Moustakas (1994) posited that the “researcher and participants are to be co-researchers” (p.110). Co-researchers provide a rich description of their experiences while the researcher engages in epoche and seeks to understand and report the lived experience. The shared position of co-researchers is mutually advantageous to the participant and the researcher because both are necessary, but neither is sufficient without the other (Moustakas, 1994).

Kruger (1999) and Patton (1996) identified purposive sampling as a common strategy to
identify primary participants in a phenomenological study. According to Gay (1996), the final sampling in a qualitative study can be small and not necessarily representative “in order to acquire an in-depth understanding” (p. 214). In a phenomenological study Creswell (2009) suggests interviewing between five and 25 participants in order to achieve data saturation. Quantitative research seeks to establish a commonality of findings through random selections. In a qualitative study, participants are chosen from specific groups who have experienced the same phenomenon, but experiences may vary from person to person.

Participants for the initial stage of this study included 560 educators employed in three public K-12 school districts in northeast Georgia who received an invitation to complete the electronic survey (Georgia Department of Education, 2012a). A total of 139 educators completed the survey. Of that number, 20 educators indicated that they had experienced cyber harassment. Finally, 10 participants agreed to participate further in the focus group, individual interviews, and guided journal reflection activity that comprised the major part of this study. Table two illustrates a demographic profile for each of the ten participants.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (Pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>School Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>25 Years</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>31-49</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>12 Years</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>31-49</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>7 Years</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>8 Years</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>19 Years</td>
<td>District Level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Elementary includes grades K-12; Middle School includes grades 6-8; High School
includes grades 9-12.

**Procedures**

Prior to submitting the documentation to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I gained written approval from each district’s superintendent. After permission was granted from the superintendents, the copies of approval forms and the completed IRB application forms were submitted to the IRB. The final IRB approval letter can be found in Appendix B. The data collection process consisted of four stages. Stage 1 was the electronic survey, Stage 2 was the focus group, Stage 3 was the face-to-face interviews, and Stage 4 was the guided journal reflection activity. Following the data collection and transcription of these four stages was the data analysis portion of the study. Chapter Four contains the findings of the study and followed Moustakas’ (1994) data analysis procedure, which consisted of epoche, horizontalization, establishment of meaning units, textural and structural descriptions and the emergence of the essence of the phenomenon.

**The Researcher's Role**

In this study, I occupied the roles of interviewer, observer, transcriber, and analyzer. I am employed in one of the school districts in this study but do not work in any of the K-12 schools in the district and do not have a supervisory role over the sampling pool. In qualitative research, the researcher is the *human instrument* in the study, contrary to quantitative research, in which the research instruments are often scales, questionnaires, or tests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this reason, it was important for me to bracket, or set aside my feelings, assumptions, or preconceptions related to this phenomenon (Appendix I). In transcendental phenomenology, this step is referred to as *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). My epoche reflections examined prior experiences and pre-judgments and I wrote a full description of my own experience relating to the phenomenon of cyber harassment (Appendix I). Being mindful not to manipulate the
situation, I conducted face-to-face participant interviews to immerse myself in the situation and to consider the total context of the phenomenon. Being physically present with the participant enabled me to note non-verbal responses and be optimally sensitive to participant reactions (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorenson, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

**Data Collection**

Data collection occurred in four stages: (a) an electronic survey, (b) a focus group interview, (c) individual interviews, and (d) a guided journal reflection activity. In each of the four data collection stages data was gathered until the phenomenon was thoroughly saturated (Creswell, 2007).

**Stage 1 Initial Electronic Survey**

Stage 1 consisted of sending an email containing a link to the electronic survey (Appendix D), which was sent to all educators via an email address designed to reach every educator in all three districts. In this communication, I provided a general overview of the nature of the study. The act of physically clicking on the link in the email served as assent to voluntarily participate in the study. In addition, consent statements to agree to participate were required to be checked electronically in order to proceed in the survey. There were no monetary incentives for educators to participate in the study.

I created the initial electronic survey, guided through the eight steps in constructing and administering a research questionnaire as outlined by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007). Step 1, *Defining Research Objectives*, was accomplished through my development of the research questions that guided this study. Likewise, Step 2, *Selecting a Sample*, was accomplished, as participants were identified. Step 3, *Designing the Questionnaire*, was completed and reviewed by peers. In order to address face and content validity, I completed Step 4, *Pilot-Testing the*
Questionnaire, by soliciting the help of expert peer debriefers. Steps 5 and 6, Precontacting the Sample and Writing a Cover Letter, were accomplished simultaneously through the initial contact email. One week after the initial e-mail, I initiated Step 7, Following Up with Nonrespondents, by re-sending the email with an added encouragement for those who had not responded to do so. The final step, Analyzing Questionnaire Data, was accomplished at the conclusion of the survey.

Data gathered through the electronic survey were considered preliminary. The purpose of the survey was to identify purposive sample candidates, elicit details regarding the specific modes and means of harassment, and determine the roles of those harassing and being harassed. Ultimately, the survey provided an opportunity to further discuss cyber harassment experiences with participants through their involvement in a focus group, participation in one-on-one interviews, and completion of guided journal reflections. At the conclusion of the electronic survey, educators who had experienced cyber harassment were invited to provide identifying and contact information if they were willing to participate in further dialogue regarding their experience(s) (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 2002).

The data from the electronic survey in questionnaire format, primarily served as a springboard to gain possible participants. Moustakas (1994) suggested that when studying a phenomenon, it is important to understand the whole picture. Information from the survey provided a snapshot of the participant pool and assisted me in building layers of meaning while gaining a glimpse at the whole picture of the phenomenon. Weaving together demographic, descriptive data into the interview, focus group, and guided journal reflection analysis helped provided a holistic representation of the phenomenon. Data collected and included were years of experience, age, grade level taught, and ethnicity of participants.
Stage 2 Focus Group Interview

The location and time of the focus group were discussed with the participants and a mutually agreed upon location and time were selected for the meetings. Although 10 participants agreed to participate in the study, only seven participants were able to attend the focus group.

Focus groups are conducted in an interview style, using open-ended questions, for small groups and may be guided or unguided by a moderator (Edmunds, 2000). Such groups are especially helpful when studying a topic that is new or for which little information is available (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010). In this study, I was the moderator and utilized the guided interview approach. I began with an icebreaker in order to set the group at ease (Morgan, 1997). Using the guided interview approach, I presented broad open-ended questions (Appendix G) accompanied by probes under each question as suggested by Morgan (1997) and Krueger and Casey (2000). Focus group questions concentrated on collective or shared experiences. An effort was made not to make the focus group discussion redundant, with the goal of a natural progression in the dialogue (Morgan, 1997). The focus group allowed me to channel group interaction and perceive the interactions of the group while noting the facial expressions, body language, and exchanges within the group (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1997). At the time of the focus group meeting, a consent form agreeing to participate in the focus group, individual interview, and guided journal reflection stages of the study was obtained from each participant (Appendix E). The participants were informed of the use of an audio recorder before the group began and were assured of the confidentiality of the digital recording’s storage.
Stage 3 Individual Interviews

Following the focus group, individual interviews were scheduled and conducted. Interviews, as a form of data collection, were chosen because they aid in developing detailed descriptions, provide descriptions of processes, and assist the researcher in gleaning how events were interpreted (Creswell, 2007; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Weiss, 1995). The interview questions were semi-structured, ensuring that the basic lines of inquiry were pursued with each person which allowed me to “explore, probe, and ask questions” (Patton, 2002, p. 343) as needed. The 10 participants were asked a set number of interview questions (Appendix E). The questions were “directed to the participants’ experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions about the theme in question” (Welman & Druger, 1999, p. 196). All interviews were audio recorded and stored in a locked cabinet for transcription and analysis.

The goal of the interviews with educators in this study was to glean rich data that accurately reflected the dynamics of cyber harassment and increased the likelihood that repetitive data emerged. Patton (2002) asserted, “in-depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable, especially if the cases are information-rich” (p. 244). Marshall and Rossman (2006) stressed the importance of the ability to “capture the deep meaning of experience in the participants’ own words” (p. 55). Berg (2007) suggested that interview durations run between 30 minutes and one hour. The duration of each interview did not exceed one hour in length and varied from 20 minutes to 45 minutes.

Stage 4: Guided Journal Reflection Activity

Following the focus group and individual interviews, the guided journal reflection activity gave each of the 10 participants an opportunity to reflect upon those interactions. This time lapse allowed participants to internally connect thoughts, feelings, and experiences related
to the phenomenon of being cyber harassed. Guided journal reflections enabled participants to voice sensitive, personal thoughts and reflections that they may have been uncomfortable sharing face to face. Berg (2007) suggested that journaling allows the participants to “express their feelings, opinions, and understandings” (p. 253). The educators were asked to choose and respond to three of five open-ended questions in writing (Appendix H).

Journal reflections were submitted in electronic format, either emailed or handwritten and scanned. I asked that the reflections be completed within two weeks of being issued and then I emailed reminders after one week. In addition, I alerted participants the day before the journal reflections were due. Following my receipt of all 10 participants’ journal reflections, all electronic submissions were password protected, and reflections on paper were stored in a secure, locked location (Heinrich, 1992; Roderick, 1986). Upon final analysis of this manuscript electronic journal reflections were printed and kept with all other reflections on paper. The electronic correspondence was then deleted for security.

Content Validity and Item Analysis

Content validity ensures that the qualitative questions in this study measure the elements of the phenomenon and fully represented what the questions were designed to measure. Carmines and Zeller (1991) defined content validity as “the extent to which a measurement reflects the specific intended domain of content” (p. 20). The questions presented in this study were evaluated for content validity by various professional experts and modified according to their suggestions (Creswell, 2007). In addition, the experts assessed data collection instruments, not only in terms of writing clarity and subject importance, but also in terms of their own feelings and impressions. For the sake of confidentiality, the professional experts called upon to
review all data collection items in this study are referred to as expert one, expert two, and expert three.

Expert one holds a doctorate degree and is an author and expert in the field of cyberbullying. This expert is one-half of an expert author team. This team is well known and has presented at conferences, published in journals, and authored several books on cyberbullying. Expert one is presently a professor at a well-known academic institution.

Expert two holds a doctorate degree and presently possesses a Georgia school psychologist certificate. This individual is knowledgeable in the field of cyberbullying and is currently an activist in issues involving the social, emotional, and behavioral wellbeing of others.

Expert three holds a doctorate degree and is presently employed at a neighboring school district office. This individual is also a graduate level professor in an education program at a private college. Expert three has prior experience with cyber harassment and has extensively researched and discussed the phenomenon with graduate level students.

**Item analysis of electronic survey questions.** The initial electronic survey (Appendix C) served as a gateway to the qualitative portion of this study. Electronic survey participants who had been cyber harassed but elected not to participate in the qualitative portion of the study still contributed to the study through their confirmation of the existence of the phenomenon. The general demographic questions asked in the electronic survey were relevant to establishing a basic understanding of the population being studied as well as to providing a starting point for the study.

**Item analysis of focus group questions.** The focus group questions (Appendix F) were designed to facilitate group discussion. The questions’ primary foci were on school policy and the procedure by which cyber harassment occurrences were handled. The experience of telling
others about aspects of their lives and experiences can be pleasurable and empowering for
participants (Morgan, 1997). The first question was an introduction of the participants and
served as an icebreaker for the group setting. The second question pertained to the group’s
definition and interpretation of cyberbullying and cyber harassment as well as establishing the
topic of discussion. Cyberbullying and cyber harassment are relatively new phenomena and lack
clear, concise definitions (Belsey, 2010; Carucci, Overhuls & Soures, 2011; Hinduja & Patchin,
investigated the various school districts’ cyberbullying policies and parallel educators’s cyber
harassment policies, if they existed. Willard (2007) asserted that confusion exists regarding the
legal specifics involving electronic abuse and clear, concise, well communicated polices will aid
in laying out the consequences that accompany the misuse of technology for all stakeholders.
Question four discussed the degree of professional development regarding electronic abuse being
offered at the school district. Technology use and misuse is still not fully understood by many
individuals, especially those not growing up in the digital age, making professional development
on electronic topics a crucial component for well-informed educators (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009;
Willard, 2007). Questions five, six, and seven concentrated on the group’s reactions following
the cyber harassment experience. Question five documented how administrators handled the
offense and whether law enforcement was involved. Question six posed a what if scenario and
participants were asked how they would handle an educator cyber harassment episode if they
were in a supervisory role. Question seven related to participants’ recourse after the occurrence.
Many negative effects following cyber abuse have been reported, including excessive stress over
the situation, reduced productivity, and depression (Guarino, et al., 2004; Hughes, 2001;
Parsons, 2005; Schlitz & Pekren, 2007). Question eight inquired about participants' knowledge of additional educators who had experienced the phenomenon but were not present in the group.

**Item analysis of individual interview questions.** The purpose of the first question in the individual interviews (Appendix F), addressed the definition and characterization of the phenomenon, and was used to gain insight into the participant’s definition of cyber harassment. Given the various definitions of cyberbullying, which are closely related, it was difficult for individuals to actually pinpoint the definition of being electronically harassed (Belsey, 2010; Carucci, Overhuls & Soures, 2011; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Willard, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Being a relatively new phenomenon, it was necessary to gain insight into the educator’s characterization of the term. While the media has reported about peer-to-peer cyberbullying, less is known about students who use electronic expertise to bully or harass educators. The second question established the educator’s role in the workplace and discerned the prevalence of cyber harassment toward the participants. The third question determined the identity of the perpetrator, if known. Anonymity, a common misconception about the Internet, is viewed as a prominent facet of cyber abuse (Brydolf, 2007). Question four in the individual interview addressed the context of the cyber harassment and was directly related to Research Question Three. The individual interviews allowed me to gain rich details about the educators’ experiences firsthand in their own words. The next three questions probed the effects that the cyber harassment experiences personally had on educators psychologically, socially, and professionally. As discussed in the review of the literature, cyber abuse toward educators by their students may affect them deeply (Parsons, 2005). Cyber harassment has been documented to cause severe strain in the lives of those experiencing it. Many have found it necessary to seek
psychological or medical attention and have seen an overall reduction in work quality (Guarino, et al., 2004; Hughes, 2001; Schlitz & Pekren, 2007).

**Data Analysis**

The first step in the data analysis process for this study was to document preliminary descriptive, demographic data from the electronic survey. An online survey tool called *Survey Monkey* was used to gather voluntary anonymous information from the educators. Survey Monkey was able to provide data grouped according to the questions on the survey (Appendix D). Questions asked were of descriptive, demographic nature such as age, gender, grade level taught, experience, etc. While the primary focus of this study was qualitative in nature, the electronic survey was utilized as an instrument that provided a participant pool of educators who had experienced electronic abuse.

Participant responses helped develop full rich descriptions of the participants’ lived experiences. Before any qualitative data analysis took place, an emphasis was placed on ongoing, multiple readings and the organization of transcript data and field notes. While making sense of the collected data linked to the research questions, Hansen (2006) reported that a researcher must sift through and identify important issues. In doing so, I immediately recognized the need to organize the data first by participant, then by the nature of the experience, and, finally, by relevance to my research questions.

After data collection, I fulfilled the primary responsibility of organizing the collected data and devising a workable plan for transcription (Creswell, 2007, Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007; Gay, 1996; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Following transcription, Moustakas (1994) outlined a very structured approach to phenomenological data analysis involving epoche, horizontalization
(significant statements), meaningful units (themes), textural and structural descriptions, and essences of the experience.

**Epoche**

The first step of transcendental phenomenology, as described by Moustakas (1994), is called *epoche*, a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment. Moustakas explained the epoche phase as “setting aside prejudgments and opening the research interview with an unbiased, receptive presence” (p. 180). Therefore, I examined prior experiences and pre-judgments and wrote a full description of my own experience (Appendix H) with the phenomenon of cyber harassment.

**Transcription**

To ensure accuracy, data, in the form of digital audio recordings, were carefully transcribed. Initially I transcribed the data myself and then engaged the services of a professional transcriptionist in order to maximize accuracy. I reviewed the accuracy of the transcribed text multiple times. Only minor errors were found requiring correction.

**Horizontalization**

Responses from interview questions were further refined and subdivided into the appropriate categories that emerged as a result of my analysis of the data, in a fashion similar to open coding but with greater detail and refinement, and were shaped by certain questions asked in the interview. Qualitative data can be extremely complex and impossible to convert into measurable units of objects seen and heard. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), information varies in “levels of abstraction, in frequency of occurrence, in relevance to central questions in the research” (pp. 156-157). In keeping with recommendations made by Miles and Huberman (1994), I built matrices in order to visually note patterns and themes, make
comparisons and contrasts, and cluster and count data from the focus group transcription, individual interview transcriptions, and entries from the guided journal reflection activity.

**Meaningful Units**

Clustering is another name for clumping information into classes, categories, and bins (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The process of coding is “a critical aspect of most qualitative research” (Gay, 1996, p. 228); thus care was taken to critically analyze data and identify meaning units, which ultimately represented categories. As is quite normal and expected in a qualitative study, ongoing revision was practiced throughout the study. This allowed me to accurately represent the data in figures, tables, and narrative discussion (Gay, 1996). The primary patterns of the data were labeled with words, numbers, and colors. During the coding process, I specifically looked for data pertinent to answering the research questions (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). The meaningful units were closely scrutinized and ultimately grouped according to the research questions.

**Textural and Structural Descriptions**

The textural and structural descriptions provide the reader with a description of what was experienced and how it was experienced. Textural descriptions consisted of the central and most thematic constituents from all the participants. Moustakas (1994) described this procedure as examining textural data obtained from the participants’ different perspectives, roles, and functions and determining what is universal or most cited for the group. After textural descriptions and before structural descriptions was the process of imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). This process provides a means of arriving at “the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). In this process, I varied the possible meanings of the textural descriptions and brainstormed vantage
points and meanings, while remaining open to structural elements as they consciously emerged. For example, while attempting to differentiate between personal, social, and professional effects, I realized that many times, the effects verbalized by participants were common and overlapping. Moustakas (1994) described this process as “varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions” (pp. 97-98). This process led to structural descriptions by delving deeper into the experience in terms of “conditions, situations, or context,” (Creswell 2007, p.8). Structural descriptions offered rich description of how the phenomenon was experienced by participants. The combination of textural and structural descriptions allows the researcher to move to the final step in data analysis, a formulation of the essence of the experience.

**Essence**

Finally, the essence of the phenomenon was formulated from the textural and structural descriptions. This step of data analysis represented the recurrent experiences found in the data. Specifically, I used the textural description to reveal *what* happened and the structural meanings to reveal *how* the phenomenon was experienced. Creswell (2007) suggested one or two paragraphs with rich descriptions. Polkinghorne (1989) stated that one should walk away from the reading thinking, “I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (p. 46).

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness addresses credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability and is vital in order to gain acceptance into the academic arena (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the focus of this study was on the experiences of teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, coaches—all educators in the three districts—it was of particular importance that I gained the trust of these individuals. In this study, careful adherence to credibility was established by
choosing the appropriate qualitative research methodology and by utilizing triangulation of data collection, member checking, and audit trails that were carefully documented. Dependability and transferability were achieved through rich, detailed documentation of the various steps of the study in the form of a researcher’s journal. Frequent communication with expert peer debriefers in both data collection and data analysis ensured confirmability. My chronicled researcher’s log also aided in the reduction of personal bias. Trustworthiness in qualitative research is vital for acceptance in the academic world and confirms that the findings of the research “are worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings accurately describe reality, thus representing a true picture (Guba, 1981). Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006) described credibility as taking into account the complexity of the study and addressing the particulars that “are not easily explained” (p. 403). Furthermore, for the research study to be useful the work should be credible and use well established research methods (Patton, 2002). Credibility depends on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher. There must be an element of confidence and truth in the findings of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002).

Triangulation. Triangulation is a cross-check method used by qualitative researchers to confirm credibility. In fact, Phillimore and Goodson (2004) deemed triangulation the single most comprehensive means of obtaining trustworthiness. Triangulation consists of looking at an equivalent phenomena or research question from supplementary sources of evidence. Denzin (1978) offered four types: the combination of data sources, methods, investigators, and theories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Phillimore and Goodson (2004) warned against using a single data
source, a single investigator’s possible interpretation, a single method of investigation, or a single informant and suggested applying a variety of theories to the study.

This study triangulated its data sources through three separate data collection methods. Data were gathered from an electronic survey, a focus group interview, face-to-face interviews, and a guided journal reflection activity. Data in a qualitative study has been termed “the evidence and the clues” and must be gathered carefully and precisely and accurately portrayed in the study (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 117). Unlike a quantitative study in which the reliability of the study is linked to the consistency of behavior or the extent to which findings would be similar if replicated, qualitative studies refer to the trustworthiness or dependability of the study which is linked to the ability to track or explain variations in the study (Creswell, 2007; Gall et al., 2007; Gay, 1996). To promote this study’s validity, I utilized several strategies. The first strategy was to simply scrutinize and re-examine data collected and analyze facts and data for accuracy. To demonstrate trustworthiness, other strategies of validity used in this study included member checking, multiple participants, multiple interviews, multiple modes of obtaining data, audit trails, and peer reviews (Creswell, 2007; Rudestam & Newton, 2001).

**Member checking.** Participants are often curious about what a researcher writes down either in note taking or in their final report. Creswell (2007) stated that member checking is an excellent process that increases credibility because it gives participants a chance to correct errors or challenge what is perceived as wrong interpretations. After each interview was transcribed, I provided participants with the written transcription in order to provide the opportunity to identify mistakes. Fortunately, the participants assured me that the transcriptions were accurate so that corrections were not necessary. Participants were also given the opportunity to review my data analysis, unanimously agreeing on my conclusions.
Audit trails. Experts agree that clear audit trails provide meaningful links between the research questions, raw data, and the findings of the study (Ary et al., 1996; Creswell, 2007; Gall et al., 2007; Gay, 1996). Audit trails provide information regarding decisions that are made and the uniqueness of the situation. An audit trail is a type of log that details the step-by-step decisions made during the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Examples include process notes, correspondence, and data reduction notes. Extra effort was made to keep papers organized, and I retained all original memos and process notes. As the researcher, I maintained one separate document that included the participants’ names along with their pseudonyms. The document was stored in a locked drawer, and I was the sole person able to access the information. All other data were electronically stored and backed up to external drives in case of computer failure. All paper and electronic copies will be destroyed after three years in compliance with Liberty University’s IRB requirements.

Dependability.

Dependability refers to consistency and stability, which is addressed through the provision of rich detail about the context and setting of the study. Dependability in qualitative studies is similar to reliability in quantitative studies (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gall, et al., 2007). The findings of the research are consistent as well as documented and could be replicated if necessary (Gall et al., 2007; Gay et al., 2006). I ensured dependability in this study by providing a detailed account of data collection, as well as documenting various stages of data analysis. This was primarily accomplished through electronic spreadsheets, which tracked each reduction of the data.

Transferability.
Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined transferability as presenting the findings in such a detailed way that the study could be duplicated or a researcher could determine if the findings of the study might transfer or be relevant to their study. In order to strengthen transferability, I articulated detailed procedures and provided a clear, concise report of the findings. Providing rich detail to the study enabled the readers to “see” the setting for themselves (Gall et al., 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Confirmability.**

Confirmability is a form of trustworthiness that ensures that the data are not distorted in ways that might serve the researcher’s own personal interests (Patton, 2002). That is, the results of the study could be confirmed or corroborated by others. I documented the process I used to check and recheck the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) asserted that a key criterion for confirmability is the extent to which the researcher admits his or her own predispositions. The process of peer review was used to ensure the reduction of bias or distortion. Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen (2010) contended that “beginning researchers who must work alone on a dissertation will find it helpful to ask an outside person” (p. 499) to be a peer reviewer, also known as peer debriefer. Colleagues and peers were provided opportunities to scrutinize data collection items and raw data along with my descriptions and comments in order to pinpoint any potential bias and to ensure credibility by reaching a similar consensus of my interpretation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefers reviewed all survey items as well as participant interview questions before they were sent to the three experts discussed in the data collection section.

The first peer debriefer was a school counselor at a public school system. This individual was a caring, energetic, and sympathetic person with a love for education and students who
possessed 20 years of experience as a school counselor. This debriefer held a master’s degree in school counseling and was certified by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission as a school counselor. The second debriefer for this study was a school principal with over 20 years of educational experience. This debriefer held a doctorate degree in education and was certified by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission in a leadership field. The third debriefer was a system level administrator with a doctorate degree in education who was certified by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission and taught graduate level courses at a nearby private university. All debriefers were dedicated professionals who readily committed to review the data collection and data analysis procedures in the study.

**Ethical Considerations**

Marshall and Rossman (2006) placed importance on the fact that researchers should explain what they are interested in learning about, how they will use the information, and how the participants will maintain final say in their contribution by reviewing the transcription of the interview before final draft. I specifically explained specifics and the purpose of this study to all participants before the surveys and interviews. Patton (2002) indicated, “statements of purpose should be simple, straightforward, and understandable” (p. 407). Patton also stated that the basis of research interviews is “first and foremost to gather data, not change people” (p. 405). I made a conscious effort to remain neutral in the interview sessions, staying focused on the purpose of the interview and reinforcing to myself and the participants that my role was not to judge or to offer a therapy session. In fact, I stressed to participants that research interviews differ from therapy in a very important way. In a therapeutic interview, the interviewer is helping the participant, while in a research interview, the participant is helping the researcher, to the degree that Moustakas (1994) replaced the term “participant” with “co-researcher” (p.15). Had
participants become upset during the interview or expressed a desire to talk to someone in a therapeutic capacity, I was prepared to provide contact information for Licensed Professional Counselors in his/her area.

All participants were assured confidentiality and were provided an opportunity to member check both the transcriptions and data analysis phase of the study. I did my best to speak in the voice of those with whom I interacted, and shared my research with the populations that I studied as a means of accountability. Creswell (2007) suggested that assigning numbers, codes, or alias assures participants of anonymity. I assigned codes, which were stored in a secure, locked cabinet at my residence. I verbally assured that respondents that they could cancel, withdraw, or conclude their participation from the study at any time without repercussion. The audiotapes, transcripts, and documents associated with this study were stored in a locked storage cabinet at my residence. The audiotapes will be erased and destroyed three years after the completion of the study. I consciously strived to present information gathered in the study in a professional manner and to the best of my ability.

Summary

The purpose for this qualitative, phenomenological study was to illuminate the lived experiences of educators who had been harassed through electronic means. The participants included educators from three K-12 public schools spanning three counties in northeast Georgia. The initial stage of the study consisted of administering an anonymous electronic survey. Those educators who had experienced cyber harassment were invited to further participate in the study. First, focus group interviews were conducted as one of the triangulated data sources. Focus group interviews were used to purposefully narrow the sample for subsequent stages of the study. Finally, individual interviews and a post-interview guided journal reflection activity
completed the data collection process. Data analysis was comprised of qualitative methods, including researcher epoche, horizontalization creation of meaningful units, description of textural and structural elements, and arrival at the essence of the phenomenon.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to elicit rural North Georgia educators’ voices regarding their cyber harassment experiences in order to develop a deeper insight into this phenomenon, its effects, and its impact on those who have experienced it. A qualitative transcendental phenomenological inquiry was conducted in order to understand the lived experiences of 10 educators who had been cyber harassed. Initial contact with potential co-researchers was made in the form of an electronic survey. These results are shared first. In addition, triangulated phenomenological data were obtained through a focus group interview, individual interviews, and guided journal reflections with 10 survey respondents who agreed to become co-researchers. Following presentation of the individual narratives of the co-researchers, my transcendental phenomenological analysis of the triangulated data is provided.

Results of Initial Electronic Survey

In order to recruit participants and provide background data, an initial electronic survey was conducted (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Purposeful sampling was achieved by sending out an anonymous electronic survey to all educators in the three school districts. An opportunity was presented at the end of the survey to voluntarily contact me, the researcher, via email or phone if the survey respondent had experienced cyber harassment and would be interested in becoming a participant (co-researcher) in the study. The 14-question electronic survey was emailed to each technology director in District A, District B, and District C. In turn, the survey was forwarded to each certified individual in each school district. A total of 139 educators voluntarily responded to the electronic anonymous survey. Of those who responded, 85.6% (n = 119) were female and 14.4% (n = 20) were male. The role of the majority of survey respondents from the electronic survey was that of teacher (n = 105) and most fell within the 31-49 year age range (n = 88). As
expected and discussed in Chapter Three, all but four respondents’ ethnicities were Caucasian. Only two respondents admitted to ever having previously participated in a survey about or relating to educator cyber harassment. Figure 1 represents a visual of the general demographic data collected from the electronic survey.

![Figure 1. Electronic survey demographic information. This graph is from SurveyMonkey© and represents the general demographic information from survey respondents.](image)

Question number eight specifically inquired about the knowledge of cyber harassment occurrences. The question asked about the awareness by the online survey respondent of any educators (other than themselves) in their school or district being electronically harassed in the past or present. This question was answered by 138 of the 139 participants and results revealed that 45.7% \((n = 63)\) answered yes, that they knew someone other than themselves who had been electronically harassed in their school or district. However, 54.7% \((n = 75)\) indicated that they had no knowledge of electronic abuse occurring in their school or district.
Figure 2. Electronic Survey Question Number Eight. This graph from SurveyMonkey© represents the awareness of cyber harassment from survey respondents.

Question number nine asked if the respondent had ever overheard a discussion regarding an educator being electronically harassed by anyone. Almost 40% ($n = 55$) of respondents indicated that they had overheard someone talking or laughing about Internet postings, embarrassing pictures, texts, or other means of electronic abused aimed at educators.
The final question in the electronic survey inquired if the educator him/herself had ever been cyber harassed. Twenty (14%) of the respondents acknowledged that they had personally experienced cyber harassment. Unfortunately, only 10 of the respondents completing the electronic survey agreed to participate in the study and provided contact information when completing the electronic survey.

**Data Collection**

Following the initial electronic survey, which was sent to approximately 560 educators in three rural North Georgia public school districts, 14.7% \((n = 20)\) of the 139 educator survey respondents indicated they had personally been cyber harassed. Ten of the survey respondents agreed to become co-researchers and further participate in the study. This group of 10 co-researchers included nine females and one male, all of whom had experienced some form and
degree of cyber harassment and indicated a willingness to participate in the qualitative portion of this study. These 10 participants were referred to as co-researchers for the purposes of this study. All but one of the co-researchers fell within the 31-49 age range, with the exception of one teacher in the 61-70 age range. Seven co-researchers attended a single focus group meeting at the beginning of the data collection process. I also met face-to-face with all 10 co-researchers for the individual interview portion of the study. Finally, nine co-researchers followed through with the guided journal reflection activity in which participants were asked to journal their reflections on five questions. Data collection from all meetings was unremitting until saturation of data was successfully achieved (Creswell, 2007).

**Focus Group Interview**

A focus group meeting of the study co-researchers was the first step in gathering triangulated data for this study. The purpose of the focus group meeting was to provide an avenue for discussion among co-researchers who had experienced similar phenomena (Creswell, 2004). This type of data collection is advantageous when gathering data on a new topic and allows participants an opportunity to react and build on the responses of other participants (Creswell, 2004). All 10 co-researchers were invited to attend a single focus group meeting; however, due to personal conflicts, only seven co-researchers attended. The focus group meeting was held in a private room at a local coffee shop and lasted approximately one hour. As the group moderator, I introduced myself and gave a brief summary of the study. After light snacks were served, I facilitated the semi-structured discussion and dialogue focused on eliciting individual and group responses to focus group questions with probes as found in Appendix E. Following transcription and data analysis, focus group transcripts were stored in a locked file cabinet where they will remain for the required three-year period.
**Individual Interviews**

Individual interviews were the second form of data collection used in this study. Creswell (1994) asserted that interviewing is a foundational method of collecting data in a qualitative study. The interviews conducted in this study were semi-structured and provided rich interpretive data that aided me in understanding how the individual episodes of cyber harassment affected the participants. Individual interviews were scheduled with each co-researcher at a predetermined date, time, and mutually convenient location. Prior to the actual interview the same introduction and summary of the study was read to all co-researchers prior to the actual interview. The interview questions (Appendix F) contained probes that facilitated a richer discussion during the interview process. The average length of the interviews was approximately 30 minutes.

**Guided Journal Reflections**

A guided journal reflection was the third form of data collection and was used to provide a lapse of time for contemplation following the focus group and individual interview sessions. Journaling is a medium that allows an individual to document sensitive, personal thoughts that they might have been uncomfortable mentioning with the group or with me during the interview (Berg, 2007). Additionally, the journal reflections gave the opportunity for each co-researcher to voice something they may have forgotten to mention during either the focus group or individual interview. Upon completion of the individual interview session, each co-researcher was reminded and given a copy of the journaling procedure (Appendix H) and instructions on how to complete the activity. Journal reflections were emailed to me in a timely manner and following the printing of a hard copy, were deleted from the email account. Journal reflections were read and then filed with transcribed data from the focus group and individual interview transcribed.
data. The hard copies were printed and put away in a locked filing cabinet and will remain there for the required three-year period.

**Participants (Co-researchers)**

Signed and dated consent forms were collected from all the co-researchers before the data gathering process began. All co-researchers were reminded that they were being audio-recorded and were given a chance to withdraw any comment they had made during the study. I personally transcribed all the data and verified accuracy of wording by listening to the audio and following along with the text a minimum of three times. Transcribed documents were password protected and emailed to participants to check for accuracy and final approval for use in this study. All emailed transcriptions were found to be an accurate representation of discussions and were approved by all participants for use. Before each communication with co-researchers, whether face-to-face or email, I took care to identify, reflect, and reduce personal biases as much as possible (epoche). Table 3 summarizes the participants’ profile information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-researcher Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Job/Grade Level(s)</th>
<th>Years in Education</th>
<th>Identity Known/Perpetrator</th>
<th>Mode or Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td>Teacher/Grades 3-5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1. Yes/Student(s)</td>
<td>1. Social Network (Facebook)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>Teacher/Grades 9-12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1. Yes/Student(s)</td>
<td>1. Unauthorized Pictures; Social Network (Facebook)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Teacher/Grades 9-12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1. Yes/Student(s)</td>
<td>1. Cyberbaiting; Unauthorized Pictures; Social Network (Facebook)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen</td>
<td>Teacher/Grades 9-12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1. Yes/Student(s)</td>
<td>1. Unauthorized Pictures; Social Network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Co-researcher Profile Table
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position/Grades</th>
<th>Incident Count</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rene</td>
<td>Teacher/Grades 9-12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1. No/Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>Teacher/Grades 6-8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1. Yes/Coworker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Teacher/Grades 6-8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1. No/Unknown (but suspected)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy</td>
<td>Teacher/Grades 9-12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1. No/Unknown (but suspected)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Teacher/Grades 9-12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1. Yes/Student(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>Administrator/K-12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1. Yes/Coworker* 2. Yes/Parent*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note* * Separate, Unrelated Incidents

In the remainder of this chapter, I first provide an individual narrative of each of the 10 co-researchers’ cyber harassment experiences. Following these narratives, I describe my analysis of the data incorporating the five transcendental phenomenological elements as outlined by Moustakas (1994): (a) Epoche (b) Identification of significant statements (c) Clustering of significant statements into subthemes 4) Synthesis of subthemes into a description of the cyber harassment experiences of the co-researchers and 5) Composite description of the phenomenon of educator cyber harassment.
Co-Researcher Narratives

The co-researcher narratives provide an overview of the educators’ role in their school as well as a summary of their cyber harassment experience. The narratives are a compilation of data collected through the focus group, individual interviews, and guided journal reflections.

Penelope. Penelope is currently a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) teacher at a 3-5 elementary school who described two cyber harassment experiences. Both of these two related cyber harassment experiences occurred when she was a fifth-grade general education teacher at the same school. She characterized cyber harassment as “somebody says unkind words to you or about you, either on the Internet or on the phone or text messages.” Penelope knew the identity of her harasser.

According to Penelope, the harassment “started from a student…a student was on Facebook and saw a remark that I had made and told me I was going to hell.” When asked to provide details, Penelope indicated that she had “clicked on something and everyday it was giving me a horoscope and I didn’t know how to get out of it.” Apparently, the harasser, who was in the fourth grade and the younger sister of a student in Penelope’s fifth-grade class, took exception to the horoscope and “said that I should be fired and that I shouldn’t have a job with kids because I didn’t believe in God and all kinds of stuff.” Because the girl’s brother was in her class, Penelope knew her parents and, the next time the parent came into the school, Penelope told her about the incident. The girl’s parents “took her off the Internet for six months because they were so embarrassed.”

The following school year, another incident involving the same girl occurred. This time, the harasser was actually in Penelope’s class. Interestingly, her parents had requested that she be in Penelope’s class. The second incident occurred when the girl, again, said “something ugly”
Penelope recalled that in the face-to-face interaction, the girl did not appear to understand that what she had posted on Facebook would be seen by Penelope, and many others. At the moment of realization, she apparently “hung her head and said, ‘I’m not gonna be able to get on my computer for a long time’.” She was subsequently given another six-month hiatus from her computer, a fact that was viewed favorably by Penelope.

Penelope interpreted the girl’s actions as “evangelizing and trying to save me….I think she thought [sic?] that she was doing a good thing even though she didn’t know she came across as threatening.” Penelope attributes the resolution of the problem to her willingness to take the necessary steps. In addition, after the second incident, Penelope “un-friended” the girl and any of her current students or students that she had had in the past who were still in the system. According to Penelope, the school system did not have a policy on communication with students via social media at the time of this occurrence. Penelope explained that she “didn’t report it in the [school] office but I did talk to the grandmother…. I didn’t think it was really school-related….I don’t know if I should have or not.” She does, however, talk about social networking to students in her STEM classes, usually at the beginning of each school year. She explains to them that she doesn’t ‘friend’ students and “I tell them that they really shouldn’t be on until they’re 13…. so, if they’re on Facebook already, they’re breaking their rules, they are lying to them and breaking the law…and, they kind of step back a second, but they’re still on, you know they’re still on.”

Wayne. Wayne is a high school social studies teacher with 12 years of teaching experience. For him, the defining characteristic of cyber harassment lies in the anonymous bravado it provides for those who engage in it. A few years ago, Wayne volunteered to coach a
Powder Puff football team. During some practice sessions, photographs were taken of him without his knowledge and posted on Facebook. Wayne describes it thusly: “A couple of boys with nothing better to do had – they were just taking pictures – candid pictures of unflattering poses, unbeknownst to myself.” After overhearing a student commenting about the photographs, Wayne went home that evening, “got on Facebook, saw the picture, and I messaged through Facebook for the individual to take it down…And, it was down within minutes.” Wayne accounted for the behavior as “16-year-old boys trying to be funny.”

Susan. Susan is a high school science teacher who has had one experience with cyber harassment. Susan was the victim of a mode of cyber harassment commonly called cyber-baiting. After reading my definition of cyber harassment for this study to Susan (Appendix D), I asked her how she would characterize the phenomenon. She responded, “Well, I just – I think cyber harassment is where, like you said, someone’s character has, or their reputation, has been impacted in a negative way.”

I asked Susan to recount her single cyber harassment experience. She recalled that her harassers were three male students in one of her lab classes. According to Susan, the incident involved one of the students asking for help with a lab activity. When Susan approached his lab station and bent over to help him, an accomplice approached her from behind and “thrust his pelvis” behind her. Unbeknownst to Susan, a third student captured the image on his cell phone. This image was posted onto one of the student’s Facebook account.

Susan became aware that her image had been posted without her permission after another teacher called her at home and told her. She immediately informed her school administration, who indicated that they already had knowledge of the photograph and produced a copy for her. Susan asked them, “Well, what was done about this…. how was it addressed?”
administrators assured Susan that, upon learning about the situation, they had had the first student “clear his Facebook account,” in their presence. In addition, one of the student’s parents “voluntarily took him out of school and sent him to the alternative school.” The third student was simply removed from Susan’s class.

When asked what she thought the main reason was that she was chosen by the harassers, Susan indicated, “Number one, I think it was because I’m female and then number two, I run a pretty tight ship.”

**Jen.** Jen has taught high school English for eight years. She has had “one severe incident [that was] related to my job but some took it further to attack me personally.” The incident involved a “clique” of girls at her school. Jen characterizes cyber harassment as “when people do things and say things that they typically wouldn’t say to you face-to-face.” She elaborated, “So, I guess they don’t have the nerve to say these things out loud to you but they either get mad, or jealous, or something and they feel like they’re safe if they don’t have to look at you while they’re saying it.”

Jen’s experience “all started when I gave one of the [clique’s] girls a failing grade for cheating.” Though Jen doesn’t have a Facebook account, she frequently accesses her cousin’s, who happens to be a “friend” of the student who was given the failing grade. After being given the failing grade, the student apparently took to Facebook to express her negative feelings regarding Jen’s assessment of her behavior. According to Jen, the student “talked about my appearance; the ugly clothes I wore and insinuated that I was gay, a lesbian.” After the student posted these things, others, mostly students and former students, commented “with similar insults and ugly comments.”
In providing this description, Jen indicated, “That’s how it all started,” but things really escalated when “I confronted the main culprit at school and asked her why she said all those mean things.” Apparently, the student denied to Jen that she had posted anything and retaliated by telling her parents that Jen had verbally attacked her for no reason. The student’s parents subsequently “wrote and called the school and the principal and even mounted a campaign to get me fired because I am gay – which I am not.” Further, other students began taking pictures of Jen “in the hall or in class and posting insulting comments and ‘Call me for a good time’ type posts on their Facebook and exchanging texts with my picture and mean things to their friends.”

When asked about what actions she then took, Jen indicated that she “did meet with [her] principal and assistant principal to let them know what was going on.” At that meeting, Jen learned that her principal and assistant principal were aware of the situation and had already met with the student’s parents. The three of them talked about what might happen next, finally advising Jen, “Just don’t do anything and see if it goes away.” It didn’t go away. Jen continued to experience the harassment through the end of the school year.

Jen has considered why she was targeted, including what the original student, and then the others, hoped to gain from their actions. She cited that the students acted for the following reasons: “Just to intimidate me, make me feel bad or worried.”

**Rene.** Rene is a high school Early Childhood Education (ECE) teacher. She has had one experience with cyber harassment and she does not know the identity of her harassers. When asked to do so, Rene characterized cyber harassment as such:

I suppose that cyber harassment would be from people who feel like they can sit behind a computer and do things and say things that they typically wouldn’t say to your face. So they don’t have the nerve to say these things out loud to you, but they feel like they’re
safe when they’re sitting behind a computer or when they have it on their phones or whatever so they kind of get extra courage and they do and say things that they typically wouldn’t but that are typically hurtful.

I asked Rene to describe her cyber harassment experience. A few years ago, she started a new program in the high school that was not well understood or received in the community. The program centered upon the opening of an on-site daycare in the high school. The daycare would be open to children of parenting high school students and faculty members and provide a ‘laboratory’ for high school students who were interested in working with young children as a career. The issue surrounded people’s misperception of the school providing daycare for its parenting students as somehow encouraging the students to have sex and become pregnant. In a local online discussion forum, the program quickly became a hot topic. Rene was dubbed the ‘Pregnancy Ringleader’ at the high school and some of the posters threatened to go the Board of Education. Of primary concern to Rene was that many posters questioned her qualifications, her judgment, and her character.

Rene quickly determined that her best defense was to get accurate information regarding the goals of the program out to the community. She wrote an article for the local newspaper and invited the community to come into the high school to see for themselves what it was all about. Eventually, they “just got tired of talking about it…it became old news.”

According to Rene, increased stress was the primary effect of the incident. Already feeling pressure to get a new program off the ground, Rene definitely felt the effects of the negative publicity. She described one day, at the beginning of the school year: “I was sitting in my classroom one afternoon, and I started feeling my face go numb, and I started having all these symptoms, and so I went over to the hospital, and they called my husband and said, ‘We
think she’s having a heart attack.”” She spent four days in the hospital undergoing tests and wearing a cardiac monitor before finding out it was all stress-related.

**Vanessa.** Vanessa is a middle school teacher who has had one experience with cyber harassment. She knew the identity of the harasser and the harassment occurred through Facebook and a local discussion forum. When asked to describe how she would characterize cyber harassment, Vanessa provided the following: “When I think of cyber harassment, I mostly think of computers and cell phones. And I think of people who won’t leave you alone, or stalk you, or send you mean stuff, I guess threaten you, too.”

Vanessa’s cyber harassment began after she accepted a new middle school teaching assignment after teaching at the elementary level for 10 years. Apparently, the teacher whose position she filled was unhappy with her new assignment and blamed Vanessa for the move. According to Vanessa, “Instead of directing her frustration to the ‘powers that be’ she blamed me for taking her job [sigh] but, they approached me about the job – I didn’t go after her job!” The teacher, not realizing that she was ‘friends’ with Vanessa, began making negative comments about her on Facebook. Similarly worded negative posts began appearing on a local, online discussion forum frequented by unhappy community members. Though Vanessa isn’t positive that the same person used both Facebook and the discussion forum to vent her anger, she feels fairly certain the same person was responsible.

Vanessa discussed the matter with fellow teachers and her family, but was reluctant to approach her administration. As a new teacher, “I didn’t want to give my principal the impression that I was whining.” In hindsight, she wishes that she had confronted her harasser, who remained at the same school, but had been moved to a different grade. After the incident, Vanessa felt bad, explaining “I don’t like people being mad at me and saying unkind things…in
fact, it made me feel so bad I cried about it on more than one occasion.” She expressed concern that people would believe the negative things being posted about her and would request that children be removed from her classes. I asked Vanessa if the experience had caused her to lose any of the “zeal” she once had for teaching, but she quickly assured me that she had not lost her zeal for teaching. She related, “If anything I am more determined to do a good job and prove the insults about my ability to be the lies they were.”

Kelly. Kelly is a middle school teacher who had “one long incident of many occurrences” regarding cyber harassment. She was harassed through a series of emails from an unknown source. I asked her to characterize cyber harassment in her own words. She provided, “I think it is when someone communicates with you electronically in a mean way…they want to make you feel bad or hurt your feelings.”

Kelly does not know the identity of the person who harassed her numerous times though email. She suspects that it was the stepfather of a student who was in her class at the time. Kelly had met numerous times with the mother and stepfather of this student. During the meetings, Kelly describes how she “always had a bad feeling” about him. In those face-to-face interactions, “he was always on the verge of saying inappropriate things, like he was kidding, but could be taken either way.” She felt uncomfortable enough that she “never wanted to be left in the room with him” alone. He told her the she “looked too young to be a teacher or he wished he had teachers that looked like me or ‘I bet you don’t sit home and grade papers.’” When she began receiving anonymous emails that seemed to be coming from someone who had a crush on her, this man did not come to mind. In fact, according to Kelly, “I didn’t really think much about it…I thought it might be a student from school….you know how middle school kids are, especially boys in seventh and eighth grade.” In fact, Kelly never found out the identity of the
person who was sending the emails, or even if they were from the same person. She explained that the writing style of the emails was similar, leading her to believe they were from the same person. Regardless, the tone of the emails escalated from complimentary to “nasty and sexual.” She replied to the emails, repeatedly asking the person to stop sending them if they were not willing to sign them.

Kelly notified her principal that she was receiving disturbing emails. His initial advice was to “just stop opening them.” Of course, she was unable to tell when she was opening one of those emails because they always appeared to come from a different sender. Her principal eventually called in the school’s technology director, who explained that it looked like the emails were coming from a fake, or proxy, server. He told her that tracing the emails was beyond his capabilities but she could probably pay someone with more expertise to trace them. He cautioned that, even if she did pay an expert, there was no guarantee of finding out where they came from. The technology director did attempt to block the emails by “filtering” them, but ended up having to change the filter numerous times because “they would just change the names they came from.” Kelly finally told him, “Just never mind…. I don’t think there was anything he could do.”

**Tracy.** Tracy is a high school English teacher and her one “major” cyber harassment experience involves false, hurtful comments being posted about her on an online public discussion forum. The identity of her harassers is unknown to her as this particular forum allows for users to create usernames. Tracy described cyber harassment, in general, as “anything that can be done to be hurtful or harmful to you…. through any kind of social media, email, text messaging, anything like that.”
I asked Tracy to describe her cyber harassment experience. She indicated that, in an online public discussion forum used to discuss local topics, issues, etc., a reference had been made that she had had an affair with her principal. Her first course of action upon learning that she had become a topic of conversation was to contact her husband, who was “very supportive and he immediately contacted the website and had all the posts removed.” Though Tracy did talk with her principal about the incidents, she felt that both their hands were tied due to the nature of the harassment. In fact, they just “wanted it to go away.” To this day, Tracy does not “approach my principal about any kind of concern I have at school…I would go to him through a third party.”

The incident has had some lasting, negative effects on Tracy. At work, she became withdrawn, feeling less confident in herself and how her coworkers viewed her. During that time, “it just made stress at work harder…everything I did was harder.” She felt that people treated her “differently because of it.” She found herself having difficulty being in public and experienced anger at having to defend and validate herself when she had done nothing wrong. Tracy revealed that she and her husband considered moving, and would have done so if the gossip hadn’t died down.

Tracy believes that the jealousy of a coworker and their intent to destroy her professional credibility is where the harassment originated. Tracy shared that she felt this particular coworker was always trying to belittle her efforts and take her credit away on projects they shared to appear more favorable to the administrators in the school. She further explained, “I think maybe they felt threatened by me or something like that, not threatened in a way that I would harm them, but that I might progress further than them or something.” Regarding any sense of
resolution, Tracy doesn’t really feel that anything was resolved. She concludes, “Sometimes I think that people are just mean and they get satisfaction from being mean.

Dana. Dana is a high school mathematics teacher. Her experience with cyber harassment occurred a few years ago and involved the practice of cyber-baiting. Dana knew the identities of the four harassers. When queried, she defined cyber harassment as “ongoing, never-ending harassment” due to the nature of technology. She shared that, “with all the electronic tools that kids have nowadays….it used to be that if someone gave you a hard time, you could go home and it was over and now if somebody gives you a hard time or harasses you or does whatever, it’s on the Internet….and it follows you everywhere.”

According to Dana, four students in one of her advanced math classes had “a game that they liked to play,” involving the coordination of one of the students setting up a photo opportunity with a teacher for one of the others to capture and post to the Internet. She provided the following description:

What they would do was, they would motion for – usually a female teacher to help them with a problem in a book or on their paper… And, so the teacher would lean over to help the student. And so they would kind of have these codes that they would do and so one of them would kind of tell the other one that they were going to do it. And one would sneak up behind you and pretend that they were having sex with you from behind and the other would take a picture.” Dana did not find out about the harassment until it had been going on for approximately three months. She recalls being told by a student, “You know there’s really something you should see.” The student then pulled up her Facebook account and showed Dana the photographs. Her first course of action was to report the
incident to her building principal, who called in the School Resource Officer. Dana also sought legal advice through her professional organization.

Upon learning that the students’ only punishment would be two days of In-School Suspension (ISS), Dana protested. Dana was very appreciative of the advice she received from a law enforcement official regarding the best way to handle her dispute with the school administration’s original decision regarding punishment. She recounts: “They told me you have to make sure that they [school administration] understand that you understand if they don’t take care of this, you might not be able to sue the student, but you can sue for a hostile work environment.” She attributes her communication to the administration of concerns that her work situation was now a hostile one requiring legal action to making things “kind of go in line.”

Dana was unable to determine why she was targeted; hypothesizing that it could have something to do with the fact that “they were kids that were, I guess, used to getting away with stuff. And I didn’t let them get away with stuff. So that could be it. But I don’t know.” She received support from her family and one of the guidance counselors at the school.

**Kathy.** Kathy is a female district-level administrator (special education director) in one of the targeted school systems. She actually shared two separate, unrelated experiences that due to the nature of the interactions and use of technology to communicate in both, she considered to be cyber harassment. In both situations, she knew the identity of the harasser. The first involved a building-level administrator (middle school principal) and the second involved the parent (father) of a student in her department. After reading the definition of cyber harassment used for my study to her, I asked Kathy to describe it from her perspective. She responded, “Cyber harassment would be any form of electronic communication in which the person has either been
falsely accused or harassed to the point of causing them some form of grief or pain, whether it be emotional or otherwise.”

In the first experience, Kathy explained that she had “received both emails and phone calls in which he [the middle school principal] disagreed with my assessment of a situation and how I handled the situation.” Apparently, the situation involved a student in the co-worker’s building who had experienced “sexual harassment, or what she deemed was sexual harassment by a male [special education] student.” In assessing the situation and providing legal guidance from her standpoint, it became apparent that the middle school principal did not agree with her recommendations on how to handle the situation. He communicated this to her in person, through emails, and in a voicemail, often using “very graphic, vulgar sexual language.” She indicated that, on the advice of her attorney, she still has the recording, though it “amazed [her] that anybody would be stupid enough to record something like that….to actually leave a message.” Although he never apologized, resolution was achieved through the administrator’s departure from the system at the end of that school year.

The second experience involved the father of a special education student who had a history of harassing his child’s teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, etc. According to Kathy, he arbitrarily “picked a victim [and] whenever he ran into a barrier with one victim, he would choose a new one.” As his most recent victim, Kathy received numerous phone calls and voicemails from the student’s father regarding various grievances. As she did not consider him to be “a stable parent,” she was constantly wondering how far he would take his threats (i.e., hiring a lawyer, suing the school system, filing an Office of Civil Rights [OCR] complaint, etc.). When questioned about the resolution of the situation, Kathy acknowledged that, with this parent, the potential for harassment is a possibility and may be ongoing until the student ages out
of school. However, she does have confidence that his understanding of protocol procedures within his child’s school will minimize his ability to harass her.

Kathy described both of these very different cases in terms of gender: “I think this was a case of they were both males and I’m a female, so I really definitely believe that the intimidation factor was there because both were men, physically larger, physically stronger than obviously myself. I’m not a large woman to begin with as far as I don’t feel like I could have the, the height to, you know, defend myself.” Kathy indicated that her primary means of support throughout the ordeals were co-workers and friends. Of course, she “could not disclose to friends who the people were and what was done, but going to [co-workers] who did have a right to know, going to my supervisors and others who were in some sort of authority” was helpful, mainly due to, “you know, being able to just get it off my chest and share with them.”

**Significant Statements**

Identifying significant statements from the transcripts from the matrix allowed me to immerse myself in the statements regarding the experiences of the co-researchers. This process, horizontalization, requires that, first, statements are simply gleaned from transcripts and provided in a table, in no particular grouping or order, to illustrate the range of perspectives about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). I have provided in Appendix J a matrix that contains every significant statement from all three data collection methods. Appendix K contains a number of individual verbatim statements that I subjectively extrapolated from my co-researchers’ transcripts in an effort to reduce the statements into a non-repetitive, more workable list.

**Meaning Units**

The third step in the data analysis process was to reduce the data into common, non-repetitive, non-overlapping meaning units (Creswell, 2007; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007; Gay, 1996;
Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). After color-coding and entering all the data into an Excel spreadsheet, all relevant, meaningful data were bracketed and consequential units were established. Bracketing is the process in which “the focus of the research is placed in brackets, everything else is set aside so that the entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and question” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). The units were coded using the participants’ words and all bracketed data were given equal value or weight. This process of reduction was especially helpful when all I wanted to view were the significant statements in order to establish meaning units. The meaning units were arrived at by closely analyzing all significant statements for repetition among co-researchers. Once the repeated, overlapping, and/or irrelevant statements were deleted, I was left with the “horizons” or textural meanings of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) defined the horizon as “the grounding or condition of the phenomenon that gives it a distinctive character (p. 95).” As shown in Table 4, 10 meaning units emerged from my analysis. Consistent with Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell’s (2004) application of Moustakas’ methodology, I have provided a sampling of the significant statements that clustered together to create each.

Table 4

**Meaning Units and Evidence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
<th>Clusters of Significant Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning Unit 1 Nature of cyber harassment</td>
<td>• Someone communicates with you electronically in a mean way. They want to make you feel bad or hurt your feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– intention of causing harm</td>
<td>• Unkind words to you or about you, either on the Internet or on the phone or text messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• They do and say things that they typically wouldn’t but that are typically hurtful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Someone’s character has or their reputation has been impacted in a negative way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Anything that is done to be hurtful or harmful to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It’s – it’s ongoing, never-ending harassment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I think of people that won’t leave you alone, or stalk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
you, or send you mean stuff…

- Really felt victimized when I’d done nothing wrong…
- There was never anything positive on there, it was just a website to degrade people and hurt people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Unit 2</th>
<th>Identity of harasser often known</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It was a parent and co-worker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I know who it was but I can’t prove it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I suspect who it was, that it was a coworker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Four students in one of my advanced classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It was a coworker at the school I now work in.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Unit 3</th>
<th>School administration involvement as first course of action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I went as high up in school authority as I think I could’ve gone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I did meet with my principal and assistant principal to let them know what was going on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I did discuss the situation with my principal and he called in the technology director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I discussed it with my ______ leader who was actually my boss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What we did is that we went to the principal…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I felt that the administration should have addressed this in a quicker and in a – in a strict manner.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Unit 4</th>
<th>Involvement of law enforcement and seeking of legal counsel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Then we talked to the school resource officers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• …law enforcement officer or school resource officer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• …according to ____charges cannot be brought against them because they never touched me and if they had not taken the pictures down when we asked them to, then that would have been classified as sexual harassment and charges could have been brought. But because they took them down when we asked them, we couldn’t bring charges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I also talk, talked to a school lawyer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Coworkers said I might need to get some legal counsel in case they fired me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I would have chosen the counsel of an attorney who wasn’t related to anyone in the town.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Meaning Unit 5
Lack of policy and lack of professional development regarding cyberbullying for students and cyber harassment for educators

- I'm not aware of any policies about Facebook or cyber bullying at all.
- I brought that to the attention of our administration, their response is that “if it doesn’t happen at school then we can’t deal with it at all.” And so that’s kind of I guess where the policy stands.
- No. And that was something that the lawyer whose counsel that I sought that summer asked me about–
- No. I think that’s a shade of gray and I think it becomes an issue when that’s done outside of school, but it affects the school environment and it’s a shade of gray on what kind of authority the school has to act on that forum.
- I don’t think so. No, my school is big on anti-bullying but not much is said about cyberbullying.
- I'm not aware of a policy here at school about it.
- And they did ask me to – the first time I ever saw the lawyer they asked me to bring the teacher handbook and I brought that and we really couldn’t find much of anything in there. And I was also told – and it wasn’t just because we didn’t really find a policy per se, as much about the cell phone – I really was kind of told – do you want to stay in the school system and how much attention do you want to bring to yourself? And how important – how important is staying in the system to you?
- There is none.
- Policy. I don’t know. I mean, I wonder now exactly what I’m aware of. I mean, I think I practice good – good practices, but I don’t know if that’s just common sense or if I’ve been instructed not to do that.
- No.
- Not that I know of. Schools need to do more to educate students and educators. Perhaps some professional development or an assembly so kids can’t say they didn't know they couldn't say that stuff on the Internet about their teachers.
- Not that I'm aware of. I would just assume that that comes under professional conduct or ethical conduct. They have offered it to parents at some of the parent nights. I’m not aware that they’ve given the teachers any of that.
- No. Even though several employees have been cyber harassed by students and coworkers, there has
never been any acknowledgment that that happens or professional development.

• Seems like they’ve been offered – but I didn't go.

Meaning Unit 6
Effects/Outcomes - Personal

• I kinda liked it when I had an appointment or was sick and didn’t have to face everyone at school.
• … there was a lot more anger there.
• I also had to deal with some very vulgar sexual, sexual language…
• I felt distress, worry, agitated that something like this could happen.
• Being attacked in a moral way hurt me.
• I was nervous and I was worried.
• The whole thing was embarrassing—to be honest.
• Anytime you have a lot of stress, I think it affects your body and health.
• I think it affected my health negatively—yeah in a bad way.
• I did find it hard to sleep.
• I was stressing over that more than anything…
• I started seeing a cardiologist. They did determine that (symptoms) were just stress-related. I missed four days of work in the hospital.
• I was – when I say I was shocked. I’m putting it mildly. I was very, very angry.
• …increased my stress level at work tremendously.
• Yeah I was embarrassed.
• My blood pressure was up for a while.
• My feelings were hurt and then I thought what if people believe all that stuff she is saying.
• So to basically intimidate or frighten me into just going ahead and giving them what they wanted.
• I’m not as trusting of people as I think I would’ve been otherwise.
• I didn’t see a shrink or anything but I was on edge a lot more than I was before so yeah…
- The experience changed the security of keeping my home and myself safe.
- I guess I was a bit more vigilant in watching what I said to students or people in the faculty lounge.
- In fact, a fellow teacher asked me if something was wrong. I was being so quiet I guess…

<p>| Meaning Unit 7 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effects/Outcomes - Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- I feel that my cyber harassment situation has made me more cautious about the relationships that I form with students, parents and co-workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- There was definitely avoidance of activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- And avoidance of going places for me. Definitely refrained from that [public places or attending functions].</td>
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<tr>
<td>- I would go straight home after work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- If I ate out I would go through the drive thru window and take it home and eat it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I became a hermit in my home.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- I definitely wouldn’t go to ball games or anything going on at school unless I had to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- It was like I would look around and wonder if the person sending me that junk was around. I thought about it at ball games and the grocery store, the school, most everywhere I went.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I felt like a lot of people treated me differently because of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I thought, have they read anything about me? Do they believe it?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- I kinda shied away from large gatherings and tended to go to the grocery store later than usual.</td>
</tr>
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<p>| Meaning Unit 8 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effects/Outcomes - Professional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- It damaged my working relationship with some of my coworkers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- It made anything that I did with my job more difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I felt like I had to work twice as hard to prove the insults wrong. I had to look twice as good and be twice [pause] everything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I was less likely to go to the teachers’ lounge, to hang in the hall with teachers talking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- You can’t be as productive, you can’t be efficient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I am more cautious with them and take less risks or even avoid them in some instances [parents].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I felt like they attacked me for doing my job and being fair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I felt like I had to second guess every step I took in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
case someone misinterpreted it.

- I’ve always kinda kept to myself at school but I do more now than ever.
- I am very cautious and evaluate every angle of the clothes I wear to work.
- It has made me attentive to the actions of others who may seem like they are interested and helpful, but are not.
- I never volunteered to have my picture put in a yearbook anymore. And I don’t allow any of my picture to be taken at work anymore.
- I had to be really careful about how I treated my students, how I reacted to students when they misbehave, particularly male students.
- I would go around and if I saw other people in the school system, I would be like in the back of my head, I wondered if they seen that picture.
- And it made work relations more difficult because coworkers viewed me differently.
- Some believed it and it made it difficult to go to my boss about things that I would need to in my job because I didn’t want to be seen talking to him.
- It made me more self-conscious about the way I dressed so that people wouldn’t look at me and think I would do things like that.
- I felt like I had to prove myself more to parents because I knew that many parents had read that, even probably some students had read it because it’s a small town. And I always felt like I needed to defend myself.
- My working life was, I became a little more withdrawn at work. I didn’t feel as confident about things that I had felt confident about – in before.
- I had a lot of maybe self-doubt about things. And it just made the stress at work a lot harder.
- Well, it made me question – it made me question why I became a teacher.
- I had to go back and re-evaluate why I became a teacher.
- … it did for a while and the one thing that made it tolerable was when I went in my classroom and shut the door and was in front of my students, I felt I had shut all of that out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Unit 9</th>
<th>I didn't have resolution with the administrator; at no point did he apologize…</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Varying degrees of</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
“closure”

- The reconciliation is he’s [administrator perpetrator] gone.
- The end of the school year helped but its still there in the back of my mind…
- I don’t feel any resolution on knowing who it was. I still wonder that.
- Yes, it resolved itself because the grandmother actually did what she should have done. I think there needs to be much more parent supervision online.
- I don’t feel – I never felt like it was taken seriously enough. And I – that really – that bothered me.
- I thought about even moving away. And had it continued I would have. I don’t feel like I got any resolution.
- Nothing was ever done and nothing was ever really resolved.
- I would have pushed for some type of punishment for the individual (and her little group) even if it were only an apology.
- I finally had to come to the conclusion in my own mind and for my own sake that just because this is a rural town and gossip and stuff spreads, that it probably could have happened in any school.
- The parents of the students involved are really the only ones I’ve – and they, the parents were just apologetic. They recognize it for silliness and hoped that there were no hard feelings and there weren’t.
- Now I am [at peace], but I mean it took a while – it took me until that group of kids graduated and now I don’t have to see them anymore and I don’t think about it anymore.
- When your feelings are hurt or you are embarrassed about something, I guess it fades but it never really goes away.
- But as far as how it was dealt with by the school and the school system, I’m not at peace about that.
- I don’t know about peace. I guess I have. More than anything I’d like to know the ______ who sent me those emails.

| Meaning Unit 10 Importance of support of co-workers, friends, and family members | …Co-workers I think primarily and friends. |
| I do have a sounding board in a good friend of mine. I didn’t really involve anyone else because the whole thing was embarrassing-----to be honest. |
There were people in the school that really, really helped me.

My husband is the one who listened to me all the time…

He [husband] was my strongest support and the one that got me through it.

The counselor that was part time here was really, really great.

I did mainly discuss with my family.

My husband and my family were my main sounding boards.

**Research question one.** Research Question One was designed to elicit factual details regarding participants’ experiences with cyber harassment, including the who, what, when, why, and how of the harassment. This included asking participants to express in their own words the definition of cyber harassment. Participants’ responses coalesced around two Meaning Units: (a) Meaning Unit One: Nature of cyber harassment as intentional and harmful, and (b) Meaning Unit Two: Identity of harasser often known.

**Meaning unit one: Nature of cyber harassment as intentional and harmful.** All participants’ definitions of cyber harassment included the element of intentional harm. Some participants clearly differentiated between traditional bullying and cyber harassment, focusing on the extra bravado afforded to cyber harassers when not face-to-face with those whom they have targeted. In the individual interview, Jen explained, “People do things and say things that they typically wouldn’t say to you face-to-face...I guess they don’t have the nerve to say these things out loud to you but they either get mad, or jealous, or something and they feel like they’re safe if they don’t have to look at you while they are saying it.” She elaborated, “Maybe when they’re sitting behind a computer or when they text or access the Internet on their phones or whatever so they kind of get extra courage and they do and say things that they typically wouldn’t but that are
mean or meant to be hurtful.” In her individual interview, Rene explained her view of the definition of cyber harassment similarly:

  Cyber harassment would be – would mainly be from people who feel like they can sit behind a computer and do things and say things that they typically wouldn’t say to your face. So they don’t have the nerve to say these things out loud to you but they feel like they’re safe when they’re sitting behind a computer or when they have it on their phones or whatever so they kind of get extra courage and they do and say things that they typically wouldn’t but that are typically hurtful. They think they’re invisible (and that) nobody’s going to find out.

  Other participants expressed, in more general terms, their views that cyber harassment is simply another means used by humans to torment each other. Kathy defined cyber harassment as “any form of electronic communication in which the person has either been falsely accused or harassed to the point of causing them some form of grief or pain, whether it be emotional or otherwise.” Susan focused on the negative intent in her definition: “Someone’s character has or their reputation has been impacted in a negative way, in some way.” Likewise, Tracy asserted that cyber harassment is “anything that is done to be hurtful or harmful to you….in an electronic format.”

  **Meaning unit two: Identity of harasser often known.** The majority of participants indicated that they knew for a fact, or felt strongly that they knew, the identity of their harasser. The study’s 10 participants reported 11 separate incidents of cyber harassment. In eight of the 11 incidents, the identity of the cyber harasser was known. In two of the incidents, the participant strongly suspected a particular person, but was unable to verify their identity. In only one case, the harassment was carried out in a completely anonymous manner.
As she shared in the focus group, Kathy was not only aware of the identities of her harassers, but was confident in her interpretation of one of her harasser’s motivation: “It was a retaliation because the administrator wanted to handle the situation one way, and I, because of what I believed to be sound legal advice, felt like it needed to be handled another way.” Likewise, in the focus group discussion, Tracy attributed her harassment to coworkers’ intention “to destroy my professional credibility” because of “jealousy….I think maybe they felt threatened by me or something like that…not that I would harm them, but that I might progress further than them.” Susan believed that her strict classroom management provided the students who harassed her to act “as a way of rebelling.”

Kelly, on the other hand, was unable to determine the identity of her harasser. According to Kelly’s journal reflection, “The whole not knowing who was harassing you was worst of all…If you know who your enemies are you can do a better job of defending yourself…The ‘unknown’ made it ten times worse for me.” In a similar vein, in the individual interview, Vanessa asserted, “I have also realized the power of the cyber world…I wish there were no such thing as being able to post anonymously on the Internet.”

**Research question two.** Research Question Two was designed to elicit details regarding the course of action taken by educators after experiencing cyber harassment. Three Meaning Units emerged: (a) Meaning Unit Three: School administration involvement as first course of action, (b) Meaning Unit Four: Involvement of law enforcement and seeking of legal counsel, and (c) Meaning Unit Five: Lack of policy and lack of professional development regarding cyberbullying for students and cyber harassment for educators.

**Meaning unit three: School administration as first course of action.** Most participants reported their cyber harassment experience to an immediate supervisor, often the building
principal. Of the 11 incidents related by participants, seven were reported to building administration. In the focus group, Dana indicated, “We went to the principal and then we talked to the school resource officers.” Kathy also “went as high up in school authority” as she thought she could. Kelly’s principal “called in the technology director for the system,” but she was less than satisfied with the outcome of that meeting. According to Kelly, after being told there was little that could be done, she “felt like he [technology director] just flipped me off.” Penelope did not report her cyber harassment experience to her building administration because she “didn’t think it was really school-related,” but questioned herself regarding that decision during the individual interview. She admitted, “I don’t know if I should have or not.”

**Meaning unit four: Involvement of law enforcement and seeking of legal counsel.**

Some co-researchers who were not satisfied with the course of action taken by school administration made legal inquiries, either to law enforcement or someone in the legal profession. After failing to find resolution through school administration channels, Tracy and Dana both consulted law enforcement to determine possible actions. Kathy, Susan, and Dana were so concerned that they were not being heard by school administration that they consulted attorneys regarding their rights.

**Meaning unit five: Lack of policy and lack of professional development regarding cyberbullying for students and cyber harassment for educators.** Without exception, participants reported that they felt unprepared to deal with their cyber harassment experiences. None had received professional development regarding the phenomena of student-to-student cyberbullying or educator cyber harassment. In each case, participants expressed their belief that professional development is needed in this area. Finally, all participants reported that, to their knowledge, their district did not have explicit policies regarding cyberbullying or cyber harassment.
Research question three. Research Question Three was designed to probe the heart of educators’ cyber harassment experiences: the personal, social, and professional effects. Questions were asked regarding the impact on participants’ health, financial wellbeing, social functioning, work relationships, work performance, etc. Participants’ responses coalesced around three Meaning Units: (a) Meaning Unit Six: Effects/Outcomes – Personal, (b) Meaning Unit Seven: Effects/Outcomes – Social, and (c) Meaning Unit Eight: Effects/Outcomes – Professional.

Meaning unit six: Effects/Outcomes – personal. The personal effects described by co-researchers were most frequently related to negative emotionality and increased stress. According to Tracy’s responses in her individual interview, “I was very distressed and my main concern was it would harm or hurt my family because I didn’t want them to be embarrassed….even though they knew it was not true, it was embarrassing that my name would be associated with something like that.” Jen recalled feeling “distressed, worried, agitated….nervous….the whole thing was embarrassing, to be honest.” In the focus group, Rene attributed medical symptoms requiring a four-day hospital stay to the stress associated with her cyber harassment. Similarly, Kelly reported negative physical effects, such as difficulty sleeping. Penelope felt “threatened….that she was spreading rumors about me.”

Although Kathy never felt fearful, she reported in her journal reflections that she had strong feelings of anger at being harassed. These were particularly acute in the situation involving a co-worker, who she felt was trying to intimidate her into agreeing with him. Similarly, Tracy felt anger that she “was having to defend and validate [herself] when [she] had done nothing wrong.”
Meaning unit seven: Effects/Outcomes – social. Social outcomes cited by participants included disrupted social relationships, avoidance of people, and avoidance of activities. Jen described how she would “go straight home after work,” essentially becoming “a hermit in my home.” Kathy also indicated that “there was definitely avoidance of activities….and avoidance of going places.” Tracy described, “I had trouble, like, going to the grocery store, being out in public.” Vanessa related that she was “hesitant about being seen at the grocery store and other places,” because “everybody I saw, I though, have they read anything about me? Do they believe it?” Likewise, Kelly “would look around and wonder if the person sending me that junk was around,” though she did not allow her fear to keep her from going places.

In the focus group, Kelly related the stress that her family had to experience due to her cyber harassment: “Anything that stresses me stresses my family cause we are real close.” Tracy related negative social effects in her work setting: “I felt like a lot of people treated me differently because of it…and, I had to put extra effort into not treating other people differently.” She also “tightened [her] ring of friends to a few close people [she] could trust.”

Meaning unit eight: Effects/Outcomes – professional. Professional effects described by participants generally varied according to whom was involved in the cyber harassment, whether students, parents, or co-workers. In all cases, effects were definitely felt in the work setting and often included feelings of heightened awareness and increased vigilance. In her journal reflection, Rene related, “My cyber harassment experience has made me more cautious about the relationships that I form with students, parents, and co-workers.” Jen described how she is now “very cautious… [evaluating] every angle of the clothes I wear to work.” In the individual interview, Tracy explained that the effects at work were pervasive:
And it made work relations more difficult because coworkers viewed me differently. Some believed it and it made it difficult to go to my boss about things that I would need to in my job because I didn’t want to be seen talking to him. It made me more self-conscious about the way I dressed so that people wouldn’t look at me and think I would do things like that. It made it where I couldn’t sleep at night for a while. I felt like I had to prove myself more to parents because I knew that many parents had read that, even probably some students had read it because it’s a small town. And I always felt like I needed to defend myself.

Some of the teacher participants indicated that the cyber harassment experience impacted their classroom instruction. Susan related feeling that “I really had to be careful after that…I felt like I had to be really careful about how I treated my students, how I reacted to students when they misbehave, particularly male students.” Dana described how she changed her teaching style, sitting at her desk instead of going to students, for a period of time after her incident. Both Wayne and Penelope indicated that their experience resulted in their incorporating the ethical use of technology into their instruction. Wayne explained,

I warn my students about what they put up – particularly using someone’s likeness without their knowledge…I try to warn my students not to do that…I am more aware of the visibility of educator/student, educator/parent, educator/coworker relationships in the day and age of social media…Nothing is secret or isolated.” Penelope related, “In my classroom I do talk about social networking at the beginning of the year to all the students, that's one of the things that I do on the first day of school.

The professional effects described by some participants involved decreased productivity at work. In the focus group, Kathy explained that, due to the stress “you can’t be as productive,
you can’t be efficient.” Susan even questioned her decision to enter the teaching profession: “I had to go back and really evaluate why I became a teacher.” Jen related, “It has shown me a very dark side of education that I would not wish upon anyone.” Tracy elaborated,

My working life was, I became a little more withdrawn at work. I didn’t feel as confident about things that I had felt confident about – in before. I had a lot of maybe self-doubt about things. And it just made the stress at work a lot harder. Everything I did was harder. I am less likely to trust co-workers. It has made it more difficult for me to trust co-workers.

Research question four. Research Question Four was designed to determine whether participants were able to come to any sort of resolution regarding their experience, and, if so, how. Two Meaning Units emerged from the data: (a) Meaning Unit Nine: Varying degrees of “closure,” (b) Meaning Unit Ten: Importance of support of co-workers, friends, and family members.

Meaning unit nine: Varying degrees of “closure”. All participants related that the cyber harassment was no longer occurring. The degree of closure felt by participants varied greatly, often according to whether the identity of the harasser was known and whether any action had been taken to address the harassment. Some participants explained that they were no longer impacted by the harassment – by sheer force of will. Kathy asserted, “Yeah, I’m not gonna let it affect my life to the point of ruining my life because I feel like, you know, that’s giving them the upper hand.” In her journal reflection, Jen admitted, “But does it still bother me--yes? I don’t like it that [she] could post all those lies without repercussion. I still feel like the victim.” Tracy admitted, “It’s still hurtful to think about it.”
In the individual interview, Susan remained unsettled due to the inaction of her school: “But as far as how it was dealt with by the school and the school system, I’m not at peace about that.” Though Penelope acknowledged that she felt peace about the incident itself, she warned, “Yes, but I really do feel there needs to be a policy about it. There should be. The Internet's not going away and the problems are only going to compound as time goes on.” As related by Vanessa:

I guess my peace comes in knowing that it wasn’t true and I wouldn’t do that to anybody. When your feelings are hurt or you are embarrassed about something, I guess it fades but it never really goes away. It’s the first thing I think of anytime I see her at school or anywhere.

**Meaning unit ten: Importance of support of co-workers, friends, and family members.**

Without exception, those participants who experienced negative effects attributed their ability to endure and cope to the support of family members, friends, and faith. In the individual interview, Tracy described the support of her spouse, who was directly affected by her harassment: “The first thing I did was contact my husband and we discussed it. He’s very supportive and he immediately contacted the website and had all the posts, removed.” Vanessa recalled seeking support from coworkers, helpful mostly because they didn’t seem to be too concerned about it: “I did discuss it with the teachers on my team and they didn’t seem to think much about it.” While Susan appreciated support received from coworkers, it was a mixed blessing because their words only served to remind her about the negativity that was out there. In the individual interview, she shared,

I remember other teachers coming by my room in private to lend me support or a word of encouragement because they felt bad that this happened. While I appreciated their
support and kind words, I remember wondering how they even knew that this happened. I personally made it a point not to go around and advertise or discuss this with anyone. But somehow other teachers and students knew what happened to me.

Description of the Experiences of the Co-Researchers

The researcher must, according to Moustakas (1994), analyze how the emergent meaning units relate to the essence of an experience by creating composite textural and structural descriptions. Textural descriptions are what was experienced, while structural descriptions reveal how it was experienced. After the textural description was obtained, I engaged in the process of imaginative variation in order to arrive at “the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). In this process, I varied the possible meanings of the textural descriptions and brainstormed vantage points and meanings and remained open to structural elements as they consciously emerged. This process led to my formulation of the structural description of the phenomenon. The combination of textural and structural descriptions allowed me to move to the final step in data analysis, a formulation of the composite description, or essence, of the phenomenon.

Textural description. What did my co-researchers experience through being cyber harassed? While the degree of perceived damage varied considerably, all co-researchers proclaimed ill effects from their experiences, with only one reporting that in part its occurrence provided some degree of benefit (i.e., improved relationship with spouse). When educators talked about being cyber harassed, they employed dramatic, emotionally-charged language, using such phrases as “a slap in the face,” “a traumatic experience,” and “distressed…then ticked off…then embarrassed.” One co-researcher summed up her experience: “it was just stress, more
than anything.” The impact was often pervasive and far-reaching. Another co-researcher explained, “I guess it fades but it never really goes away.”

The co-researchers described the experience as consuming a great deal of mental energy, with the educators mulling over not only the details of the harassment itself, but spending a considerable amount of time in introspection as well. One individual talked about the electronic harassment as causing her to “go back and re-evaluate why I became a teacher.” The experience was described by one educator as making her “more self-conscious” and feeling “victimized when I’d done nothing wrong.” As one might expect, one co-researcher concluded, “It has changed me as a person.”

**Structural description.** In what contexts did the educators experience cyber harassment? Some co-researchers focused on the unexpectedness of the experience of being victimized by a student, parent, or co-worker. They expressed the shock that they felt that the cyber harassment was happening at all. In cases characterized by educators being harassed by a student, this was attributed to the disruption of the traditional power differential held by the educator over a student. One co-researcher explained the students’ actions against her as being the result of her “tightly run ship” with the students acting in the only manner available to them to feel powerful. In the cases of educators experiencing cyber harassment at the hands of co-workers, co-researchers expressed dismay at the lack of professionalism that would allow such behavior to occur. The fact that few co-researchers felt supported by their school administration in the aftermath of the harassment added salt to those wounds.

All co-researchers felt some degree of victimization, expressing their perception that the acts committed against them were unprovoked and undeserved. Some co-researchers were able to find a way to explain the actions of their cyber harasser, providing some degree of closure to
the event. Others, unfortunately, grappled not only with the incomprehensibility of the act itself, but an inability to find meaning in actions of the cyber harassers. Some co-researchers were able to effectively move past their experience, mainly through arriving at the “reason” for their cyber harassers’ actions.

**Composite Description of the Phenomenon of Educator Cyber Harassment**

According to Moustakas (1994) the textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon being investigated must finally be synthesized into a composite description. This step of analysis, called “intuitive integration,” in turn becomes the essence that captures the overarching themes or meaning of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). Two overarching themes were consistently present throughout all steps in my transcendental phenomenological data analysis. The overarching themes included: (a) The cyber harassment of rural north Georgia educators is a valid phenomenon that results in lasting, negative effects; and (b) Rural north Georgia educators are not prepared for, nor do they feel professionally supported in the aftermath of the phenomenon of cyber harassment.

While there was a plethora of literature and advice supporting the struggles that youth endure following cyberbullying, there is a noticeable paucity of research and discussion of the aftermath of adult educators’ cyber harassment experiences. This inquiry sought to fill this void in the literature and reported that the consequences of being cyber harassed were varied, but not one co-researcher reported feeling positive after their experience. The cyber harassment of educators can have potentially devastating consequences, especially when one’s character, professional practice, or personal life is under attack. Statements such as, “I was stressed,” “I couldn’t sleep,” “I was hurt,” “I started seeing a cardiologist,” are samplings of personal repercussions resulting from their experiences. Social concerns and feelings of isolation
included statements from educators like, “There was definitely an avoidance of going places” and “People treated me differently,” and “I became a hermit in my home.” Some educators avoided public places after their workday was over, serving as further evidence that cyber harassment deeply affected them in a negative connotation. Unfortunately, the negative aftermath of experiencing cyber harassment affected their ability to perform their jobs and some felt it had damaged their careers: “I was attacked for doing my job and being fair,” according to Jen. “It made me question why I became a teacher,” remarked Susan.

While traditional bullying of educators has occurred, to some degree, since there has been a classroom of students, this form of bullying is quite different than in the past. Obviously, in the past, when the prank or deed was done in order to make fun of or humiliate the educator, the audience was those present at that point in time. Ultimately, while the prank or deed was no doubt recounted, context was lost and did not carry the original purpose being told secondhand. With today’s technology, the embarrassment and humiliation can be viewed over and over, simultaneously, by multitudes of people. Many of the co-researchers still have not achieved a sense of resolution, even though in some cases, the cyber harassment occurred several years prior.

The second overarching theme that emerged in this inquiry was the unpreparedness of educators to handle the experience, coupled with the lack of support available to them following their cyber harassment experience. The school districts in this study had not been compelled to educate their teachers on the existence of cyber harassment, much less how to deal with it. Not one of the co-researchers had received professional development regarding cyber harassment, nor were they aware of the existence of any school policies regarding the phenomenon.
Some of the co-researchers were reluctant to bring their experiences to the attention of the school administration. Reasons for their hesitance varied from embarrassment to fear of “making waves” to a general uncertainty of the appropriateness of reporting something that did not physically happen on school grounds. Ultimately, most co-researchers described finding themselves in situations where they had little confidence in themselves or others to successfully navigate the social, emotional, administrative, and legal issues associated with cyber harassment. It was as though the misbehaviors had occurred in some alternate reality, one in which the perpetrator couldn’t be touched.

Summary

This chapter reported the findings of this study that consisted of the experiences of 10 rural North Georgia educators with cyber harassment. Each participant consented to and participated a face-to-face interview, seven participated in a focus group interview, and all ten participants responded to the guided journal reflection activity. All transcribed data were then phenomenologically reduced to 10 meaning units.

Two meaning units emerged pertaining to the context in which the cyber harassment occurred. The reduced data revealed the anti-social nature of cyber harassment and that the harasser(s) was often known or identified. The first meaning unit identified classified the nature of cyber harassment as being an act that was intentional and meant to cause harm. All 10 participants unanimously felt victimized and all had feelings of uneasiness, hurt, and anxiety following the cyber harassment. The second meaning unit uncovered was that the victim often knew the identity of the harasser. An individual co-researcher reported only one completely anonymous incident. In all other cases reported, the co-researcher knew or thought they knew the identity of the cyber harasser.
Three meaning units surfaced regarding the course of action taken by the participant following their cyber harassment experience. The meaning units arrived at were the school’s administration being the first notified following an occurrence of cyber harassment, the involvement of law enforcement and legal counsel, and the lack of school policy and professional development regarding cyberbullying for students and cyber harassment for students. While the perceived satisfaction of reporting the incident to an administrator varied, a majority of the participants sought out an administrator in order to report the cyber harassment. Three of the participants sought legal counsel but none of the cyber harassment occurrences resulted in charges being filed or actual court cases. Lack of or nonexistence of school policies and professional development relating to cyberbullying and cyber harassment were cited as problems by all co-researchers.

Three meaning units emerged after exploring the information surrounding the effects and outcomes of educators being cyber harassed. The themes were categorized as personal outcomes, social outcomes, and professional outcomes following cyber harassment. Each co-researcher reported negative effects, with most expressing feelings of being deeply and personally offended by their cyber harassment experience(s). Many were reluctant to be seen in public and adamantly avoided public places because they were embarrassed and thought others might believe the slander and offenses that were posted against them. Educators were also affected professionally by their cyber harassment experience(s). Depending on the perpetrator of the electronic abuse (student, parent, or co-worker), many challenging obstacles surfaced that made the workday of the educator more challenging than usual.

The final two meaning units that emerged were the varying degrees of closure or resolution following the participants’ cyber harassment experience(s) and the importance of
support from co-workers, friends, and family. The degree of closure varied depending on the individual and the perpetrator involved. For example, closure for one participant came when the students who cyber harassed her were taken from her class and transferred to another school. Another participant found it difficult to ever achieve closure because she never knew the identity of the perpetrator(s). Fortunately, for all participants, the support of co-workers, friends, or family was readily available and assisted educators in the aftermath of the unpleasant experience of being cyber harassed.

Two overarching themes present throughout the data analysis included the verification and validation of the phenomenon of cyber harassment and the unpreparedness of north Georgia educators to deal with it.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Few would dispute the plethora of benefits afforded by today’s technological advances. Unfortunately, it is becoming increasingly obvious that there are many negative aspects of technology to be found in the digital age. As technology has expanded, so have the opportunities to utilize electronic communications in anti-social and harmful ways. Cyberbullying, a much-researched phenomenon, is the term used when the bullying of a student by another student takes place via any electronic device including a cell phone or the Internet. Cyberbullying has not only affected adolescents, but adults as well. Cyber harassment, a form of cyberbullying, is the term used when the victim or perpetrator of electronic abuse is an adult.

This qualitative inquiry was conducted in order to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of a group of north Georgia educators who had been cyber harassed. Transcendental phenomenology, as outlined by Moustakas (1994), was chosen as the appropriate methodology for this study, not only because it allowed me to understand the meaning of my co-researchers’ experiences, but because Moustakas (1994) outlined detailed collection procedures and explicit data analysis steps. Through this methodology, I acquired and collected data in a highly structured manner that allowed me to grasp the “structural essences” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 35) of the experience of educator cyber harassment. This study, Educators’ Perspectives On Having Been Cyber Harassed: A Phenomenological Study, has evolved over the past three years. Ten educator co-researchers who self-reported one or more separate experiences with cyber harassment provided the data for the study. Through a focus group interview, individual interviews, and a guided journal reflection activity, the co-researchers provided detailed accounts of their cyber harassment experiences. In this chapter, a summary of the findings, implications
of the findings, acknowledgement of the study’s limitations, and recommendations for future research are presented.

**Summary of the Findings**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to elicit rural North Georgia educators’ voices regarding their cyber harassment experiences in order to develop a deeper insight into the phenomenon, its effects, and its impact on those who have experienced it, as well as fill a gap in existing literature. Four research questions guided the study. Ten meaning units emerged from the data, resulting in two overarching themes.

**Research Question One**

According to affected rural North Georgia school district educators, what were the contexts in which the cyber harassment occurred?

Two meaning units emerged through analysis of data relating to Research Question One, which sought to gain insight into the participants’ definitions of cyber harassment and the contexts in which the harassment occurred. The two meaning units that emerged were: The nature of cyber harassment as intentional and harmful and the identity of harasser is often known.

Being a relatively new phenomenon, it was important to establish characterization for the term cyber harassment. While many terms were used to describe the anti-social behavior of electronically harassing someone, all participants’ descriptions contained an element of intentionality in causing distress or harm to the victim(s).

The second meaning unit related to the participants’ knowledge regarding the identity of the harasser. Though the anonymity afforded by the Internet is often cited in cyberbullying research, it was not a factor with the majority of participants in this study (Brydolf, 2007;
Only three of the 10 participants did not know the identity of the perpetrator(s); furthermore, in two of three of those cases, the participant had a strong suspicion regarding the identity of their harasser but could not prove it for certain.

**Research Question Two**

What course of action did the rural North Georgia educators take in response to their experience(s) with cyber harassment?

Research Question Two was designed to probe the course of action taken by educators after their cyber harassment experience. Three meaning units emerged regarding the involvement of school administration, law enforcement, and legal counsel, as well as the lack of policies, procedures, and professional development regarding cyberbullying and cyber harassment. The meaning units that coalesced through analysis of the data were school administration involvement as first course of action, involvement of law enforcement and seeking of legal counsel, and lack of policy and lack of professional development regarding cyberbullying for students and cyber harassment for educators.

Of the 11 incidents of cyber harassment detailed by study participants, seven were reported to building administration. Two participants shared that dissatisfaction with the response of their building administration led to their consultation with law enforcement regarding possible legal alternatives. Three participants sought the advice of legal counsel. All participants reported feeling completely unprepared to deal with cyber harassment; furthermore, they voiced a lack of confidence in their school administration’s willingness and/or ability to deal with the situation.
Research Question Three

How do rural North Georgia educators who have been cyber harassed describe the effects of the phenomenon on them?

Research Question Three was designed to probe the heart of educators’ cyber harassment experiences: the personal, social, and professional effects. Meaning units that emerged were effects/outcomes that are personal, effects/outcomes that are social, and effects/outcomes that are professional.

The personal effects described by participants were most often expressed in terms of increased stress, sometimes leading to physical effects. Social outcomes included disrupted private and work relationships, avoidance of social situations, and reluctance to attend events once enjoyed. Professional effects included heightened awareness and increased vigilance in the work setting.

Research Question Four

How, if at all, do rural North Georgia educators achieve resolution after experiencing cyber harassment?

Research Question Four was designed to determine whether participants were able to come to any sort of resolution regarding their experiences, and, if so, how. Meaning units that surfaced were varying degrees of closure and the importance of support of co-workers, friends, and family members.

The degree of closure reported by participants varied greatly, often according to whether the identity of the harasser was known and whether any action had been taken to address the harassment. Without exception, those participants who experienced negative effects attributed their ability to prevail to the support of family members, friends, and faith.
Implications of the Findings

The implications of the findings in this study are particularly relevant in the educational arena, but have applications in other settings as well. The educator participants in this study presented a dismal picture of life after having been cyber harassed. They were all strong, dedicated people committed to being good educators. For the most part, the educators just wanted the harasser(s) to be held accountable for their offenses. They believe that educator cyber harassment is real, and they are living proof that it is occurring in school systems. The results of this study have theoretical, methodological, and practical implications.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework used to guide the present study can be found in the tenets of three theories that address human interaction in terms of power or control exerted over others: General Strain Theory (GST), antiauthority cyber expression, and Contrapower Harassment Theory. These lenses provided a logical way to view the phenomenon of educator cyber harassment. In general, the study’s results confirmed the applicability of these theories as a guiding framework.

According to the General Strain Theory (GST), people attempt to ameliorate their own negative feelings by harming others (Agnew, 1992). GST is a sociological theory that has been used to explain criminal behavior, specifically that of delinquents, but can be useful in the examination of bullying behavior as well. According to Agnew (1992), delinquent behavior may result following the negative interpersonal strain that “increases the likelihood that individuals will experience one or more of a range of negative emotions” (p. 59). The most salient of these, according to GST, is anger, which “results when individuals blame their adversity on others…. [and] increases the individual’s level of felt injury, creates a desire for
retaliation/revenge, energizes the individual for action, and lowers inhibitions” (p. 59-60).

Antiauthority cyber expression is the electronic result of a subordinate individual’s dissatisfaction with his/her position in a relationship characterized by a power differential. (Lave, Duguid & Fernandez, 1992; Shariff, 2009). Shariff (2009) used this term to describe students’ retaliation against educators through their targeted, negative online postings that resulted in “disempowered” authority figures who “have little control over who sees the online comments about them” (p. 8).

Finally, existing power differentials are inverted when, according to the Contrapower Harassment Theory, a person is able to exert control over a superior through harassing behaviors (Benson, 1984; Rospenda, Richman & Nawyn, 1998). Though initially a lens through which student sexual harassment of university professors has been examined (DeSouza & Fansler, 2003), the term has more recently been used to cover a wider range of negative student behaviors directed at educators, including incivility, bullying, and sexual attention (Lampman, Phelps, Bancroft, & Beneke, 2009).

**Methodological and Empirical Implications**

A qualitative research design was appropriate for this study in order to document the human and social behaviors surrounding participants’ cyber harassment experiences (Strauss, 1987). More specifically, a transcendental phenomenological research design was instrumental because cyber harassment is a topic that warrants further exploration through personal interaction with the participants and the gathering of nonnumeric data (Creswell, 2007; Van Manen, 1990). As mentioned in previous chapters, cyberbullying and cyber harassment are relatively new phenomena that lack a concrete, agreed upon definition.
It was important to use this method of inquiry to capture the impact that cyber harassment had on these educators’ lives. Participants were able to voice their despair at not being heard or taken seriously when they were electronically abused. Through this method they also painted a picture of their anxiety, embarrassment, and added personal, social, professional stresses, as well as various stages of resolution. Some participants remarked that it made them feel better to “vent” about what happened to them, while others seemed embarrassed and reluctant to discuss details. The chance given to participants to speak out upholds Moustakas’ (1994) stance that the buttress of transcendental phenomenology lies in the ability to describe rather than explain.

Chapter Four provided rich details of the participants’ contextual settings obtained through a focus group interview, individual interviews, and guided journal reflections. Analysis of the data led to the development of common meaning units based on participants’ experiences.

Prior to the implementation of this study, an extensive literature review was conducted. Although I discovered that some research had been conducted regarding the face-to-face abuse of educators at the hands of students, I found that very little attention had been paid to the maltreatment of educators through electronic means. Since the completion of the study, I have yet to discover research specifically regarding educator cyber harassment. In Chapter Two, I conducted a review of past empirical studies on topics related to cyber harassment such as traditional bullying (between youths, face-to-face) and cyberbullying (between youths, electronic). This research verified the detrimental side effects youths experience following episodes of traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Potential psychological repercussions discussed in Chapter Two included eating disorders, depression, reduced self-esteem, and a plethora of mental and physical maladies (Coloroso, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2012; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008; Sabella, et al,
2013; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012; Shariff, 2009; Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2012). Participants in this study reported many of the same effects reported in previous studies.

The lack of a solid definition for cyberbullying and cyber harassment is documented as varying by researchers. When asked for their definition of cyber harassment, my co-researchers’ definitions also varied but carried a common thread of intentional harm. They also attested to a lack of policy, attention, and prevention measures in their schools. One co-researcher commented, “Even though several employees have been cyber harassed by students and coworkers, there has never been any acknowledgement [by school administration] that it happened nor have [they] provided any professional development for us.”

**Practical Implications**

Many studies have examined the phenomena of students’ traditional bullying and cyberbullying of other students (Coloroso, 2008; Ericson, 2001; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowlaski & Limber, 2007; Olweus, 1978, 1999, 2000, 2003; Willard, 2007). Abundant literature exists on the negative psychological and social effects of cyberbullying (Carucci & Overhuls, et al., 2011; Coloroso, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, 2010; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Shariff, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010; Trolley & Hanel, 2010; Willard, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). These could conceivably include depression, eating disorders, poor academic performance in school, absenteeism, various health maladies, mental health issues, safety concerns, and even suicide. Hinduja and Patchin (2012) point out the unique characteristics of electronic abuse, such as the bully’s access to his/her target around the clock, possible feelings of disinhibition, and the ability to communicate with a wide audience, that make this form of antisocial behavior particularly damaging to individuals.
In contrast, the parallel phenomenon of educator cyber harassment has been generally overlooked. It is important for those who have been cyber harassed to have a voice as well. This study provides evidence that, not only are educators being cyber harassed, they are experiencing many of the same negative psychological and social effects as their youth counterparts. The results of this study yield practical implications at the individual level, school district level, and the broader, legal level.

**Individual educators.** The presence of technology in the everyday lives of students and educators will not be going away any time soon. According to Grunwald (2013), 43% of all children (preK–12), and 60% of high school students use a smartphone on a daily or weekly basis. One in three children (34%) use electronic tablets. While smartphones are the most popular device for daily toting, some K–12 students bring other family-owned devices to school every day as well. Eight percent take an iPod Touch, 5% take a laptop or other portable device, 2% take an electronic tablet, 2% take a handheld gaming device, and 1% take an e-reader to school every day. About one in six parents (16%) reports that children are allowed to use family-owned mobile devices in the classroom—often called a “bring your own device” (BYOD) approach.

To some degree, it becomes reasonable and necessary to expect educators to become as technologically literate as possible. Beside the fact that teachers are increasingly required to use technology to enhance instruction is the reality that today’s students are digital natives. In order to survive in today’s classrooms, educators must arm themselves with as much technological knowledge as possible, whether they are personally comfortable with technology or not.

**School districts.** Many people spend as much time in cyber reality as in physical reality. In an effort to be proactive, school policymakers should focus as much time and attention as
possible on teaching good citizenship in both settings. Efforts to expand anti-bullying programs to include cyberbullying and victimization would likely be beneficial. Hinduja and Patchin (2012) posited “a respectful climate at school will produce students who are safe, smart, honest, and responsible at school and online” (p. 29). Furthermore, these researchers asserted “schools have a moral, ethical, and legal responsibility to prevent and respond to cyberbullying…” (p. 26). The concept of good digital citizenship is one whose time has come.

The co-researchers in this study expressed varying degrees of displeasure and distress as a result of experiencing cyber harassment. The antisocial nature of the harassment sparked a plethora of personal, social, and professional effects, sometimes leading to health problems, job dissatisfaction, disrupted relationships, and social anxiety. A particularly disturbing, but not unexpected, finding in the study involved the general non-responsiveness of school administrators to whom teachers reported their cyber harassment. For various reasons, from ignorance to an unwillingness to get involved, many administrators took a “hands-off” stance regarding incidents involving their teachers, staff, and students, often citing the fact that the harassment technically occurred off campus as their primary excuse. It is my belief that, until this phenomenon is viewed as “location neutral,” progress made to address cyber harassment will be limited. A primary goal should be to eliminate the climate of attempting to determine the where of the harassment, and instead focus on the who, why and how of those involved.

As a profession, teaching has a relatively high turnover rate compared to other careers (Ingersoll, 2012). According to Ingersoll, between 40-50% of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching, an attrition rate that has increased “by about one third in the past two decades” (p. 3). Much-touted teacher shortages would appear to have less to do with insufficient teacher production and more to do with an inability to keep people on the job.
Research has shown that, for beginning teachers in particular, lack of support is one of the main factors behind departing teachers’ decisions to leave (Ingersoll, 2003). Concerted efforts must be made to more effectively support all teachers in their efforts to educate students.

**Policymakers.** In 1997, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment protects the Internet (Jacobs, 2010). Since that time, courts have tried to strike a balance between a student’s right to free speech and a school district’s responsibility to safely educate its students. Kowalski et al. (2008) asserted that the Court has placed limitations on the free speech of minors, pointing out that their speech is not protected by the Constitution if it constitutes a threat; is lewd, vulgar, or profane; materially disrupts the school; or invades the rights of others. On the other hand, according to Hinduja and Patchin (2009), courts have only allowed speech restrictions by students on campus, disallowing constraints on students’ off-campus speech. Since the majority of student Internet activity is off-campus, the waters become very murky.

Kowalski et al. (2008) highlighted the quandary of school systems, which are required to provide a safe learning environment. On one hand, schools must respect the rights and freedoms of students and teachers. On the other hand, they must face the possibility of being held liable if they act negligently. Schools are placed firmly between the quintessential “rock and hard place.” School districts need clear guidance in the form of policies and procedures that have come out of legal statutes concerning these issues.

**Study Limitations**

Limitations are restrictions in the study over which the researcher has no control (Creswell, 2007; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). In a qualitative study, conclusions are viewed as tentative and are reviewed on an ongoing basis, and generalizations are speculative or
nonexistent (Gay, 1996). As with all qualitative studies, this transcendental phenomenological study, designed to understand how being cyber harassed affected educators in rural North Georgia, has several limitations. First of all, the use of humans as instruments of data collection is always considered a limitation, especially when there are large amounts of narrative data involved (Creswell, 2007; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). It was not possible to collect data from a gender or ethnically diverse population. The pool of possible participants from the three school districts was predominately female (80%) and White (99.9%) (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). Therefore, the findings of this study are only applicable to this particular group of rural North Georgia educators. This study is not generalizable to other school districts that are geographically or socio-economically different than those in this study. Participants were self-selected and it is possible that their recollection of cyber harassment occurrence(s) could have been biased, distorted, or omitted during the focus group interview, individual interviews, or guided journal reflections. The study was also limited by the participants’ willingness to disclose information due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter. The participants were self-selected; therefore, some may have refrained from discussing details of being cyber harassed or being truthful because of fear of retaliation or fear of embarrassment by peers.

Another possible limitation addressed was the fact that potential participants in one of the districts may have known me professionally, although I had no professional authority over them. I relied on two factors to minimize the impact this may have had on the study. The first was my repeated and sincere assurances of confidentiality. The second arose from the fact that I had no known negative relationships within my professional community.

Additionally, the sensitive nature of the topic being studied may have prevented
participants from speaking truthfully about their experiences. Even though I assured them of the anonymity of their identity, participants sought assurances that the study could not be linked to them for fear of embarrassment and retaliation. In the words of Tracy, “I just don’t want all that to resurface.” Another limitation of this study is that only seven of the ten co-researchers participated in the focus group meeting. Attempts to include the three in a separate focus group were not successful. Finally, the potential for researcher bias to emerge must be acknowledged.

In an effort to curb potential preconceptions and assumptions, I faithfully engaged in the practice of epoche (Appendix H) before and after each meeting with the participants as well as before and after data analysis of transcripts and notes. I engaged in this process in an effort to examine data with pristine eyes (Moustakas, 1994).

**Recommendations for Future Research**

There has been very little research concerning the cyber harassment of educators. The majority of electronic abuse research has been conducted with adolescent victims and perpetrators. The results of this study, verifying the presence of a phenomenon not often talked about in academia, could lead to additional research. Quantitative research is important to establish the prevalence of educator cyber harassment in a variety of academic settings. It would be beneficial for all stakeholders to have more accurate, up-to-date data on the number of educators who have been cyber harassed. However, this is difficult in an atmosphere where key central office officials are reluctant to acknowledge that it occurs, or forbid research that might reveal the occurrence(s) of cyber harassment in their districts. While seeking permission to conduct my study in their school districts, I met with resistance from some North Georgia school superintendents. One superintendent said, “I don’t want to stir up a hornet’s nest,” while another replied, “I haven’t heard of this happening in my schools and if it is—I do not know want to
know about it.” As one of the co-researchers in this study asserted, “I just want someone to take
this seriously.” The aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of a group of educators
who had experienced cyber harassment. In order to adequately address the suffering experiences
by those who are harassed much more research is needed for cyber harassment to be understood
in not only an educational setting but in other settings beyond the school. Additional research is
needed in creating policy and procedures for responding to cyber harassment occurrences. This
research would provide a roadmap for educators and administrators to follow in the event they
experience electronic harassment. In the absence of a clear, well-defined protocol, co-
researchers in this study were ill prepared and felt unsure of the next step following their cyber-
harassment experience. Furthermore, the results of this research are available to inform
policymakers, administrators, law enforcement, would-be perpetrators, and fellow educators so
that the challenges associated with this type of electronic abuse are better understood. My co-
researchers in this study struggled to fathom the reasons that they were targeted, often grappling
with the fact that they could not identify what they had done to warrant this kind of abuse. It is
important to note that, regardless of age, individuals should feel safe in their personal, social, and
professional environments. The voices of the rural north Georgia educators in this study
confirmed that electronic abuse, cyber harassment, is a valid phenomenon with lasting, negative
effects and that schools are ill-prepared to support educators who have experienced it.
REFERENCES


163


Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union, No. 96-511 (June 26, 2007).


doi:10.1177/089124398012001003


# APPENDIX A: STATE CYBERSTALKING AND CYBER HARASSMENT LAWS


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<td>Wyo. Stat. § 6-2-506</td>
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May 3, 2013

Paula Davenport
IRB Approval 1596.050313: Educators’ Perspectives on Having Been Cyber
Harassed: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Paula,

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.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054
APPENDIX C: ELECTRONIC SURVEY CONSENT AND DIRECTIONS

Electronic Survey Consent:

Unfortunately, there is little research available on the cyber harassment of educators. This questionnaire has been designed to collect your experiences regarding cyber harassment and collect a broad range of information that may help to advance knowledge and raise awareness about this phenomenon. First and foremost, the participation in this survey is voluntary. ALL of your answers will be treated confidentially and not linked back to you in any way. Your responses will be combined with other respondents; therefore, your individual responses will not be identifiable.

About this survey:

The purpose of this survey is to gather general demographic data as well as specific information about cyber harassment.

Please proceed through the survey and if you have ever experienced cyber harassment, there will be a window appear at the end this survey with my contact information should you be willing to further discuss your cyber harassment experience(s).

Definition of cyber harassment:

Cyber harassment is a form of electronic harassment aimed at adults (Willard, 2007). The harassment may be in the form of emails, discussion groups, cell phone text messages, cell phone picture messages, websites, blogs, social networking sites, gaming sites, list servs, or any other electronic communication form.

The type of harassment aimed at you may have been insulting remarks about your appearance, teaching style, sexual innuendoes, untruthful rumors, embarrassing or obscene pictures, hurtful words, sound recordings, false statements, or pictures distributed electronically or via cell phones, intended for harm. The perpetrator of the cyber harassment may be a student, co-worker, parent of a student or you may not know the identity of the person cyber harassing you.

Thank you very much for your time.

If you would like further information, please contact pmdavenport@liberty.edu

a. I confirm that I have read and understood the above conditions. _____ Yes

b. I understand that my participation is voluntary and anonymous and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and free of consequences. _____ Yes

c. I agree to take part in the electronic survey portion of this study. _____ Yes
**Wording on the screen after the submission of the electronic survey if the participant wishes to contact me.**

Please carefully consider consenting to speaking with me individually, in person or on the phone, as you could be making a significant contribution to the research base on this anti-authority, antisocial, electronic form of bullying aimed at educators.

If you would like to further participate in this study, my contact information is below. Should you elect to participate, please be assured that your identity and any information that you share will not be linked back to you or your school in any form or fashion and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. Contact me via email. My email address is: pmdavenport@liberty.edu

2. Contact me via telephone. My telephone number is: 706-781-7374

Again, Thank you for your time.

Paula Davenport, Researcher
Liberty University
pmdavenport@liberty.edu
APPENDIX D: ELECTRONIC SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Consent

2. What is your gender?
   a. male
   b. female

3. What is your role in your school? Check all that apply.
   a. Teacher
   b. Administrator
   c. Media Specialist
   d. Other. Please Specify _______________________

4. What is your age?
   (a) 20-30
   (b) 31-49
   (c) 50-60
   (d) 61-70
   (e) 71 and over

5. What grade(s) do you teach? If you do not directly teach, please check the building or environment that you work in. Check all that apply.
   a. Kindergarten
   b. 1st Grade
   c. 2nd Grade
   d. 3rd Grade
   e. 4th Grade
   f. 5th Grade
   g. 6th Grade
   h. 7th Grade
   i. 8th Grade
   j. 9th Grade
   k. 10th Grade
   l. 11th Grade
   m. 12th Grade
   n. Various Primary School Grades K-2
   o. Various Elementary School Grades 3-5
   p. Various Middle School Grades 6-8
   q. Various High School Grades 9-12
   r. Building Level Administrator
   s. System Level Administrator
   t. Other – Please Specify _________________________
6. At the end of this school year, how many years of educator (teacher, admin, media, etc) experience do you have? (Include private and public schools as well as out of state experience as an educator)
   a. 0-5 Years
   b. 6-10 Years
   c. 11-15 Years
   d. 16-20 Years
   e. 21-30 Years
   f. Over 30 Years

7. What is your ethnicity?
   a. African American/Black
   b. Caucasian/White
   c. Hispanic/Latino
   d. Multi-racial
   e. Asian
   f. American Indian/Alaskan Native
   g. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
   h. Other – please write in: ______________

8. Are you aware of educators in your school or district being harassed electronically by students, parents, coworkers, or administrators?
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. Have you ever overheard students (or discussed directly) discussing cyber harassing an educator? Examples might include students talking and/or laughing about Internet postings, embarrassing pictures, texts, of educators?
   a. Yes
   b. No

10. If you have heard about cyber harassment against an educator in a school or district, what was the way (mode) the educator was harassed? Check all that apply.
   a. I have never heard of an educator being electronically harassed in my school or district.
   b. Cell phone text
   c. Cell phone camera or other camera device
   d. Social networking site like Facebook
   e. Instant Messaging
   f. Chat Room
   g. Email
   h. Online Gaming Site
   i. Other Please specify ______________________
11. What level of priority do administrators in your school or district place on the phenomenon of educator cyber harassment??
   a. 1 – Not a priority at all. The school system or administrators at my school do not think cyber harassment of educators is occurring.
   b. 2 – Low priority. Educators report cyber harassment but my administrators don’t think it’s a problem in my school.
   c. 3 – Medium priority. Educators report cyber harassment and my administrators take cyber harassment of educators fairly seriously.
   d. 4 – High priority. Educators report cyber harassment and my administrators take cyber harassment of educators very seriously and involve parents and law officials.

12. Prior to this survey, have you ever participated in a survey about or relating to the cyber harassment of educators?
   a. Yes
   b. No

13. Do you know a colleague or coworker who has experienced cyber harassment in some form (using the definition above).
   a. Yes
   b. No

14. Have you personally experienced cyber harassment in some form?
   a. Yes
   b. No

Thank you very much for your time.

**Wording on the screen after the submission of the electronic survey.**

If you would like to participate further in this study, my contact information is below. Should you elect to participate, please be assured that your identity and any information that you share will not be linked back to you or your school in any form or fashion.

1. Contact me via email. My email address is: pmdavenport@liberty.ed

2. Contact me via telephone. My telephone number is: 706-781-7374

Again, Thank you for your time.

Paula Davenport, Researcher
Liberty University
You are invited to be in a research study of educators who have been cyber harassed via any electronic device, Internet, or cell phone. You were selected as a possible participant because you have indicated that you have been cyber harassed at least one time. I 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 Paula Davenport.

**Background Information:**
The purpose of this study is to elicit rural North Georgia educators’ voices regarding their cyber harassment experiences in order to develop a deeper insight of this phenomenon, its effects, and its impact on those who have experienced it, as well as fill a gap in existing literature.

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

1. Attend and participate in a focus group interview held at a convenient location within the district agreed on by the participants and the researcher. The focus group interview will not last any longer than 30 minutes. Participants are asked to use pseudonyms when discussing their experience(s) and keep all discussion during group time confidential. The focus group interview will be digitally voice recorded to ensure accuracy of transcription.
2. Attend and participate in a face-to-face interview session with the researcher. The individual interview will not last any longer than 45 minutes. Participants are asked to use pseudonyms when discussing their experience. The face-to-face interview will be digitally voice recorded to ensure accuracy of transcription.
3. Participate in a guided journal upon the completion of the focus group and face-to-face interview. The time lapse will allow time for reflection and provide a venue to voice thoughts and feelings that may have been uncomfortable discussing. The journal reflections will be sent to the researcher either by postal mail or email.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**
The risks of being in this study are no more than the participants would encounter in everyday life.

Unfortunately there is little research available on cyber harassment of educators, so this study has been designed to collect information that may help to advance knowledge and raise awareness about this phenomenon. Therefore, it is important that research is ongoing regarding the contexts in which cyber harassment occurs, the course of action following the harassment, and the effects the phenomenon has on the individual. If school leaders, teachers, law
enforcement officials, and lawmakers are better able to conceptualize cyber harassment and its impact on educators, more effective solutions to this phenomenon may be developed.

**Compensation:**
Participants in this study will not be compensated.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

The information relayed to the researcher will not be linked to your name or school in any way. You may withdraw any answer or statement at any time during this study. You will be given the opportunity to review your answers or statements. The following procedures will aid in the confidentiality of this study:

1. After transcription, all digitally recorded interviews will be erased from the recorder.
2. ALL paper and printed digital communication with the researcher will be coded with pseudonym and stored in a locked file cabinet for three years at which time it will be destroyed.
3. Participants of the study will be asked to use pseudonyms when describing their cyber harassment experience(s).
4. Participants of focus groups will be asked to maintain confidentiality regarding discussions but the researcher cannot guarantee the confidentiality and privacy of the discussion.

**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 Liberty University or your school district. 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 researcher conducting this study is Paula Davenport. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at pmdavenport@liberty.edu. The researcher’s supervisor is Dr. Billie Holubz and may be contacted at bjholubz@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, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu

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

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.
I understand I may withdraw from this study without repercussions by simply contacting the researcher at pmdavenport@liberty.edu.

_____ I agree and understand that the researcher will audio record focus group and face-to-face interviews for data collection accuracy.

Signature: _________________________________ Date: ________________

Signature of Investigator: __________________________ Date: ________________

**IRB Code Numbers:** 1596.050313

**IRB Expiration Date:** May 3, 2014
APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS WITH PROBES

Introduction:

The goal of this study is to record the impact educator cyber harassment has had on your life. Memories or discussing this experience may be distressing to you and you may withdraw from this interview at any time. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your responses will be digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Your responses will not identify your name or school; they will be coded with a pseudonym for confidentiality. Paper copies will be kept under lock and key and digital copies will be password protected. You have the right to withdraw any statement(s) from this study at any time.

Consent:
Have you read and signed the consent form necessary to proceed with this focus group session?

Instructions:

I will ask you a series of several questions related to your cyber harassment experience(s). Take your time and answer them as thoroughly and honestly as you can. Please refrain from mentioning specific names and use pseudonyms during our discussion.

1. Would you please introduce yourselves and inform the group of your current role in education?

2. What is your interpretation/definition of cyber harassment?

   Do you have a specific definition?

   Is there a length of time or number of occurrences that have to occur to qualify for the term cyber harassment?

3. Are you aware of the student cyberbullying policies at your school?

   Are there parallel educator cyber-harassment policies at your school?

   Will you tell us what either policies are?

   Do you think they adequately address possible incidents of educator cyber harassment?

4. Has your school provided teachers and/or administrators cyber bullying and/or cyber harassment professional development?

   If so, please describe.
5. Do you feel that your school’s administration handled your cyber harassment experience(s) appropriately?

Was law enforcement involved?

Were parents involved?

What was the perpetrator(s)’ punishment(s)?

Were you satisfied with the punishment(s) levied?

In your opinion, was the offense taken seriously?

Do you feel a sense of resolution?

6. How would you handle a cyber harassment occurrence as a supervisor, if you had staff members’ cyber harassed either by students or other adults?

Discuss how this would be different than how your experience was handled (if any).

7. Following your cyber harassment occurrence(s), have you changed any normal routine you may have engaged in? For example, avoid social media and/or closed Facebook® account.

Has your attitude towards technology changed?

Classroom management style changed? i.e. paranoid of cell phones in class)

Avoidance of being face-to-face with perpetrators?

8. Are you “at peace” or have you found resolution regarding your cyber harassment experience(s)?

Why or why not?
APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH PROBES

Introduction:

The goal of this study is to record the impact educator cyber harassment has had on your life. Memories or discussing this experience may be distressing to you and you may withdraw from this interview at any time. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your responses will be digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Your responses will not identify your name or school; they will be coded with a pseudonym for confidentiality. Paper copies will be kept under lock and key and digital copies will be password protected. You have the right to withdraw any statement(s) from this study at any time.

Consent:
Have you read and signed the consent form necessary to proceed with this interview?

Definition of cyber harassment in this study:

Cyber harassment is a form of electronic harassment aimed at adults (Willard, 2007). The harassment may be in the form of emails, discussion groups, cell phone text messages, cell phone picture messages, websites, blogs, social networking sites, gaming sites, list servs, or any other electronic communication form.

The type of harassment aimed at you may have been insulting remarks about your appearance, teaching style, sexual innuendoes, untruthful rumors, embarrassing or obscene pictures, hurtful words, sound recordings, false statements, or pictures distributed electronically or via cell phones, intended for harm. The perpetrator of the cyber harassment may be a student, co-worker, parent of a student or you may not know the identity of the person cyber harassing you.

Instructions:

I will ask you a series of several questions related to your cyber harassment experience. Take your time and answer them as thoroughly and honestly as you can. Please refrain from mentioning specific names and use pseudonyms during our discussion.

Open-Ended Interview Questions/Items

Other Guiding Questions the interviewer will use to facilitate the conversation are in italics below the main question.

1. What is your definition of cyber harassment; how would you characterize the phenomenon?
2. What is your job title and how many separate, unrelated incidents have you endured?
3. Who were the perpetrators, if known?
4. Describe what happened in each of the occurrence(s) of cyber harassment.
   
   A. How many perpetrators were involved?

   B. Did you know them? Anonymous?

   C. How were you cyber harassed?

   D. What were the modes of harassment?
      Website?
      Cell phone?
      Blog?
      Discussion group?
      Social networking site? Which one?
      Gaming site?
      Other? ______________________

   E. Describe the details.
      Inciting others to harassing you?
      Impersonation?
      Were you called abusive names?
      Were you threatened?
      Were there false rumors spread about you?
      Has someone sent fake emails to you or to others supposedly from you?
      Has someone set up a fake profile in your name?
      Have you been bombarded with unwanted emails that you suspect someone has signed you up for?

   F. What action did you take when you initially realized you were being cyber harassed?
      Reported to school authorities? What did they say or what was done?
      Were parents notified?
      Reported to outside of school authority –police / law enforcement?
      Intervention by your employer?
      Satisfied with consequences of perpetrator?
      Other?

   G. Did you feel fear and or distress as a result of being cyber harassed? Please describe how you felt.
      Do you think the perpetrator would ever physically harm you?

   H. What do you think was the main reason the perpetrator chose you as their target?
      Retaliation?
      Grudge? (real or imagined)
      Gender?
      Religion or belief?
      Racial or ethnic origin?
Age?
Disability?
Sexual Orientation?
Appearance?
Other ?

I. What do you think your harasser hoped to gain by their actions?
To scare you or make you afraid
To cause psychological harm
To cause you physical harm
To cause you financial harm
To have a relationship with you
To entertain themselves
To entertain others
To harm your personal or professional reputation
For financial gain
To isolate you from others
Don’t know
Other __________________________

J. Why did the harassment end? Or has it?
What did you do to ensure that it stopped?
Contacted Internet service provider or mobile phone company to report the abuse?
Contact the administrator of the chat room, social networking authorities, etc.?
Did not respond / Ignored?
Changed email address?
Closed or left social networking site, gaming site, etc.?
Changed cell phone number?
Responded to harasser?
Other ?

5. How did the cyber harassment experience(s) affect you personally?
A. How has this experience affected your health?
Doctor?
Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge?
Not being able to stop or control worrying?
Feeling everyone has seen pictures or read online info and feel embarrassed?
Trouble Relaxing?

B. What are the financial changes in your life as a result of being cyber harassed?
Lost money?
Expense of security measures?
Legal expenses?
Annual / sick leave used?
6. How did the cyber harassment experience(s) affect you socially?
   A. How did the cyber harassment affect your day-to-day interaction with:
      Students?
      Coworkers?
      Parents?
   B. Do you refrain from being in public or attending social functions because you feel others have read untruths about you online, seen embarrassing pictures, or just uncomfortable in crowds because of the cyber abuse?

7. How did the cyber harassment experience(s) affect you professionally?
   A. What were the changes to your working life?
      Work performance?
      Work relationships to coworkers?
      Cut working hours?
      Changed employment?
      Are you thinking about or decided to leave the teaching profession?
      Fired or demoted?
   B. Have you lost some of the ‘zeal’ you once had for teaching as a result of being cyber harassed?

8. Did you feel a sense of resolution following your being cyber harassment experience?
   A. Reported to any “higher level” school authority than was originally reported to?
   B. Reported to any “higher level” law or legal authority than was originally reported to?
   C. Were you able to “find peace” following the experience?
   D. How long did it take for you to find peace or resolution?
   E. If not, why do you think you have not found “peace” or resolution?
   F. If not, what needs to happen in order for you to find “peace” or resolution?

9. In order to put the experience behind you and move on, whom did you seek out and discuss the distress you felt following the experience(s)?
A. Did you turn to anyone for support?
   Family
   Counseling
   Therapy
   Doctor
   Pastor/Clergy
   Other
   Fellow Victims
APPENDIX H: GUIDED JOURNAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

**Introduction:**

The goal of this guided journal reflection is to record the impact educator cyber harassment has had on your life. Memories or discussing this experience may be distressing to you and you may withdraw from this activity at any time. Your participation in this study’s journal writing is voluntary and your responses will be held in the strictest confidence. Your responses will not identify your name or school; they will be coded with a pseudonym for confidentiality. You have the right to withdraw any statement (s) in this interview at any time.

**Consent:**
Have you read and signed the consent form necessary to proceed with this guided journal reflection?

**Definition of cyber harassment:**

Cyber harassment is a form of electronic harassment aimed at adults (Willard, 2007). The harassment may be in the form of emails, discussion groups, cell phone text messages, cell phone picture messages, websites, blogs, social networking sites, gaming sites, list servs, or any other electronic communication form.

The type of harassment aimed at you may have been insulting remarks about your appearance, teaching style, sexual innuendoes, untruthful rumors, embarrassing or obscene pictures, hurtful words, sound recordings, false statements, or pictures distributed electronically or via cell phones, intended for harm. The perpetrator of the cyber harassment may be a student, co-worker, parent of a student or you may not know the identity of the person cyber harassing you.

**Instructions:**

I have listed several questions related to your cyber harassment experience. Take your time and reflect on them as honestly as you can. Please refrain from mentioning specific names and use pseudonyms during your writing. I have enclosed a self addressed stamped envelope to return your responses to me or you may email them to me at pmdavenport@liberty.edu.

**Guided Journal Reflection Questions:**

1. How do you feel the experience of being cyber harassed has impacted your view of educator/student, educator/parent, or educator/coworker relationships?

2. How has the experience of being cyber harassed changed you?

3. In retrospect, would you have done anything differently during the course of your cyber harassment experience? Please explain.
4. What advice would you give to a fellow educator who is experiencing cyber harassment?

5. Is there anything you would be willing to share with me that you had forgotten to mention or were reluctant to verbalize in our one on one interview?
APPENDIX I: RESEARCHER’S EPOCHE STATEMENT

I knew I wanted to be a teacher as far back as the third grade. I have worked in education for over twenty-three years and witnessed many changes and “swings of the pendulum” as I call it. I have never personally been a victim of cyber harassment but feel the pain and agony of those around me facing this experience. Facing the task of suspending judgment and accepting educators’ cyber harassment experiences was difficult for me. Teaching and education are very near and dear to my heart; therefore, I have several presuppositions related to the education profession. I concentrated on the purpose and significance for the study and did my best to refrain from judgment in all communication and analysis.

My presuppositions are below in a list format. The list represents ongoing epoch statements that have surfaced during this study. The statements are in no particular order.

1. Administrators have the responsibility to make sure that everyone in their school is safe, including teachers.
2. If you cannot sign your name to something you don’t need to be saying it.
3. You are working with middle school students; you should expect a certain amount of abuse.
4. There is a certain amount of truth in the old adage: boys will be boys.
5. There is a difference in free speech and being disrespectful.
6. Some people need to let go of things they cannot do anything about.
7. Gossip is not new. It will always be around.
8. We live in a technological environment, we need to be educating these kids on digital citizenship.
9. Educators deserve to be treated with respect.
10. Just do your job and you will earn the reputation you deserve.
11. Most people know to take what is on the Internet with a “grain of salt”.
12. This incident happened three years ago. Don’t let it define your life.
13. Why are administrators choosing to place so much emphasis on student cyberbullying when the same thing is happening to their staff members?
14. If I were this person’s administrator, I would have supported them more.
15. A participant relayed to me: “I guess it goes with the territory”. Being a target for someone to embarrass, humiliate, and make their life miserable doesn't’ fit in to anyone’s territory.
16. This educator thought if they made a big deal of their experience of being cyber harassed they would loose their job. Since when does doing the right thing jeopardize one’s job?

17. I acknowledge the sympathy and pain I feel for this participant. They are clearly upset but I must remain as neutral as possible during the interview.
## APPENDIX J: HORIZONALIZATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FULL MATRIX OF SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Any form of electronic communication in which the person has either been falsely accused or harassed to the point of causing them some form of grief or pain, whether it be emotional or otherwise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parent and co-worker was the culprit</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I just kept getting these emails that I couldn’t tell where they came from.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I replied and told them to stop sending me emails if they were too coward to sign their name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Anyway, they kept getting worse and worse—I mean nasty and sexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>He said it looked like they came from a fake server or something, a prox, a proxy server or something like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>They want to make you feel bad or hurt your feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I think it is when someone communicates with you electronically in a mean way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I do not know who it was but I suspect who it was, that it was a coworker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>It was a coworker at the school I now work in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Yes, I know exactly who they were.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>–It was like topics, yes. And it made reference that I had – had an affair with my boss.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I received a phone call telling me that my name or not my name but identifying things about me was listed on a website and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Until this past year I would have said I thought of mainly teenagers but not anymore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>. I think of people that won’t leave you alone, or stalk you, or send you mean stuff, I guess threaten you too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I mostly think of computers and cell phones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Four students in one of my advanced classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>It’s – it’s ongoing, never-ending harassment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Online forums, message boards, usually, message boards that provide anonymity to the attacker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Yeah, any kind of social media, email, text messaging, anything like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>anything that is done to be hurtful or harmful to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>I was on one side of the counter and the boy in the group, they were on the other side and I leaned over the lab station and another boy came up behind me, I was not aware of this, another boy came up behind me and he –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>There was a game that they liked to play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>They would kind have these codes that they would do and so one of them would kind of tell the other one that they were doing it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Cyber harassment to me would be that somebody says unkind words to you or about you, either on the Internet or on the phone or text messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Students. Two years ago, they would’ve been juniors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Seems like there might have been three.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I guess in the picture it looked like he was thrusting his pelvis behind me.

someone’s character has or their reputation has been impacted in a negative way

And another boy off to the side in another group just quickly snapped the picture on his cell phone

And one would sneak up behind you and pretend that they were having sex with you from behind and the other would take a picture and they would post it all over the Internet.

my image in an unflattering pose without my permission.

Right pictures of teachers, unsuspecting teachers in unflattering poses and posting them on Facebook. use their cells phones to do to do this.

Volunteered to coach the power puff team and we were holding practices and couple of boys would with nothing better to do had – they were just taking pictures – candid, candid pictures of unflattering poses unbeknownst to myself or ---. The whole not knowing who was harassing you was worse of all.

I know who it was but I can’t prove it. I think it was the stepfather.

I felt angry that I was having to defend and validate myself when I had done nothing wrong.

So they don’t have the nerve to say these things out loud to you but they feel like they’re safe when they’re sitting behind a computer or when they have it on their phones or whatever so they kind of get extra courage

They do and say things that they typically wouldn’t but that are typically hurtful.

cyber harassment would be – would mainly be from people who feel like they can sit behind a computer and do things and say things that they typically wouldn’t say to your face

Topix is a website that you can say things and not put your name on it.

Like, Mrs. _____ is such a good teacher why are they replacing her with someone else?
<p>| 43 | Admin-didn't agree with how student discipline was handled. |
| 44 | She started blasting me on Facebook and I guess it was her on Topix saying those mean things. |
| 45 | Like, Mrs. ____ is such a good teacher why are they replacing her with someone else? |
| 46 | She’s not gonna be able to handle those kids. |
| 47 | My kid had her and she was terrible. Just stuff like that. |
| 48 | Topix is a website that you can say things and not put your name on it. |
| 49 | Nobody’s going to find out. |
| 50 | she started blasting me on Facebook and I guess it was her on Topix saying those things. |
| 51 | this was in like a chat room would – I don’t know what you would call that. |
| 52 | She’s not gonna be able to handle those kids. My kid had her and she was terrible. Just stuff like that. |
| 53 | And so that started the thread. I was called names. I was said to be the ringleader of pregnancy at the high school. |
| 54 | I – my husband’s biggest fear was if you cause a stink you’ll lose your job. |
| 55 | I don’t like people being mad at me and saying unkind things. |
| 56 | I felt bad. In fact, it made me feel so bad I cried about it on more than one occasion. |
| 57 | I was distressed first, I was ticked off, then I was embarrassed and then because of the way politics works in a small school system. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>I was also said to be stuck up. I’m stuck up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>it was my image that I had no control over.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>I did not know how he was, how far he was willing to push the envelope. I, I, this isn’t, this was not a stable parent,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>The harassment started from a student, a student was on Facebook and saw a remark that I had made and told me I was going to hell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Well, when you wrote about your teacher yesterday on the Internet on Facebook are you aware that all my friends saw what you wrote because my name was there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>She was giving me a religion lesson and she said that I should be fired and that I shouldn’t have a job with kids because I didn't believe in God and all kinds of stuff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Parent-doesn't agree with anything school says or does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>With the administrator not necessarily fear, but definitely distress and anger and hurt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>I was very distressed and my main concern was it would harm or hurt my family because I didn’t want them to be embarrassed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>I wasn’t really threatened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>They just said some nice things and some sexual things and I was uncomfortable because I didn’t know who was sending them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>I did feel distress and worry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Do I take it seriously or not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Was I making a big deal over nothing or were they going to come to my house and attack me or something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>I was worried and nervous after they got more graphic and suggestive.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
it's been kid-related and it kinda hurt my feelings.

I also felt threatened.

I felt threatened that she was spreading rumors about me, not just that she was confronting me about my beliefs.

I didn’t really feel fear but I did feel like I was kind of attacked professionally, like I didn’t know what I was doing, like people were – they were questioning my judgment I guess and questioning my character.

But I never felt like anybody was going to hurt us, or hurt me or any of those things.

it started in 2009 and it’s still there and it has almost 400 posts where people have discussed this whole situation.

It is one thing to talk to someone about someone but to put it out there for the public to see is criminal and should be done just that way.

I felt disrespected and unimportant.

I just felt like – I had literally been slapped in the face

The experience of being harassed electronically was quite nerve racking for me.

I felt harassed.

Retaliation, the parent was really just harassing the teacher, the para pro, these administrators.

To intimidate me into agreeing with him and providing the same, you know, to, to provide the – to get me to do, you know, intimidate, make me afraid. I was head of that particular department.

I think this was a case of they were both males and I’m a female, so I really definitely believe that the intimidation factor was there because both were men. both were intimidating, both wanted me to do what it was they wanted done

So to basically intimidate or frighten me into just going ahead and giving them what they wanted, which was basically their way
| 88 | I had received both email and cell phone calls. |
| 89 | Left messages on my school cell phone, emails to me, basically threatened me, filed an OCR complaint, has written letters and messages in the child’s agenda, harassed the teachers, other administrators on email. |
| 90 | But for me personally, he was very harassing on calls to my office and cell. |
| 91 | parent offense: Yes, it was reported. |
| 92 | I went as high up in school authority as I think I could’ve gone, and I also talk, talked to a school lawyer. |
| 93 | people do things and say things that they typically wouldn’t say to you face-to-face. |
| 94 | I guess they don’t have the nerve to say these things out loud to you but they either get mad, or jealous, or something and they feel like they’re safe if they don’t have to look at you while they are saying it |
| 95 | The perpetrators – this was on a Facebook account but some of the friends of the person who posted it sent it to people I don’t even know. |
| 96 | I think she had them all gain up on me both at school and online. |
| 97 | I felt like since I have pleasing characteristics it is my fault I get these emails |
| 98 | Kinda like the movies that say it was the girls fault she was raped because she dressed so provocatively—low cut or short shorts |
| 99 | Makes me so mad. |
| 100 | Well—heck, I don’t know why I got them. |
| 101 | I sure didn’t provoke anyone—student or parent—to send me crap like that. |
| 102 | I think she was actually being a missionary. |
| 103 | I think she actually believes that anybody that believes in horoscopes is going to hell that they don't believe in God or anything |
| 104 | I showed the emails that I had not deleted to a couple of my teacher friends. |
| 105 | Yeah. I didn't report it in the office but I did talk to the grandmother. I didn't think it was really school related. I did tell a few of the teachers what had happened on Facebook. |
| 106 | Unflattering pictures on facebook. |
| 107 | She was mad because I took her teaching assignment so I guess you would call it a grudge or retaliation or something. |
| 108 | Just to vent or make me look bad to made her look better. |
| 109 | a reason for being moved. |
| 110 | I honestly don’t know. |
| 111 | they were couple of my former players and I mean one of these kids, outside of school, we hunt together. |
| 112 | It wasn’t a – it was 16 year old boys trying to be funny. |
| 113 | I don’t know anybody who would be jealous of me, but I think maybe they felt threatened by me or something like that, not threatened in a way that I would harm them, but that I might progress further than them or something |
| 114 | So some retaliation? Oh yeah, it was a way of rebelling, |
| 115 | I think they just wanted laughs. I just didn’t want it to go any further. |
| 116 | I think it was because I’m female and then number two, I run a pretty tight ship |
| 117 | Yes, just to be mean to me. |
And then when I found out that a male teacher had had the same thing done to them.

They were going to go through and see as many as many 10th grade teachers that they can get on there as possible.

Oh, it really was a contest.

I don’t know. I think they – they’re intension was to destroy my professional credibility.

A lot of it I think was, jealousy

They just wanted to be big men on campus and thought it was a fun game and look what I can get away with,

I am younger than her—maybe she didn’t like it because of that

I did discuss the situation with my principal

He called in the technology director for the system

They were kids that I guess used to getting away with stuff.

And I didn’t let them get away with stuff.

I decided really the only thing we can do is put the real information out to the public and let everybody start to make their decision.

So it – because you were starting something new? Yes.

Absolutely, I felt like he just flipped me off..

I mostly talked to my family and my boyfriend at the time about it
I did show the teacher that teaches next door to me some of the emails

And I feel like they didn’t understand.

A social networking site and it was Facebook

I really don't know that she had a purpose except that she thought she was evangelizing and trying to save me.

teacher gave failing grade for cheating on assignment

She talked about my appearance; the ugly clothes I wore and insinuated I might be gay-a lesbian.

Others commented on the post with similar insults and ugly comments.

Well it made – it stressed me

I always worried that people believed the lies that were on Facebook about me and that bothered me

I just can't describe the hurt and embarrassment I endured.

I was embarrassed to be in public.

both were intimidating, both wanted me to do what it was they wanted done.

So to basically intimidate or frighten me into just going ahead and giving them what they wanted, which was basically their way.

I also had to deal with some very vulgar sexual, sexual language, have, and I still have that recording.

I’m not as trusting of people as I think I would’ve been otherwise.
| 148     | there was a lot more anger there                      |
| 149     | I just wanted to curl up and be alone.                |
| 150     | Just to intimidate me.                                |
| 151     | Social networking site. –                            |
| 152     | I did not take any action                            |
| 153     | I discussed it with my ______ leader who was actually my boss. |
| 154     | There’s not anything really we can do because there are no names behind these people. |
| 155     | I talked to paid attorneys and I think that’s about everybody – administration and law enforcement officer or school resource officer |
| 156     | You went down to the administration and told them about it. |
| 157     | I was told that two members of the administration watched the boy clear his Facebook account. |
| 158     | one of the boy’s mother just voluntarily took him out of the school and sent him to the alternative school. |
| 159     | They are willing to acknowledge that student cyber harassment is an issue for students, but teacher cyber harassment isn't a problem. |
| 160     | I didn’t approach her directly but probably should have. |
| 161     | He’s very supportive and he immediately contacted the website and had all the posts, removed. |
| 162     | The first thing I did was contacted my husband and we discussed it. |
| 163 | I messaged through Facebook the individual and said, “Take it down.” And it was down within minutes. |
| 164 | they do want to get me fired. |
| 165 | It all started when I gave one of the girls a failing grade for cheating. |
| 166 | We did is that we went to the principal and then we talked to the school resource officers. |
| 167 | I did discuss it with the teachers on my team and they didn’t seem to think much about it. I didn’t really want it to be a school thing, you know? |
| 168 | Make me feel bad or worried. |
| 169 | I don’t know that there was anything for them to gain; except maybe score a brownie point with Jane. |
| 170 | That little clique of girls practically ran the school. If you got on their bad you’ve had it. They were always making fun of someone. |
| 171 | You can’t be as productive, you can’t be efficient. |
| 172 | It all started when I gave one of the girls a failing grade for cheating. |
| 173 | Just to intimidate me. |
| 174 | they do want to get me fired. |
| 175 | My cousin is her friend on Facebook and she told me the way Jane (pseudonym) had blasted me.. |
| 176 | There was definitely avoidance of activities. And avoidance of going places for me. |
| 177 | I think it takes a lot of productivity out. |
on their Facebook and exchanging texts with my picture and mean things to their friends

I didn’t even know they took it

Even the expressions I make because someone had taken a picture with a camera and I looked weird.

My cousin told me about pictures students were taking of me in the hall or in class and posting insulting comments and call me for a good time type posts

Make me feel bad or worried.

There was a lot more anger there.

I think as a woman I have a much more heightened awareness of the, of the gender issue.

I am more cautious with them and take less risks or even avoid them in some instances.

Yeah I was embarrassed. I’ll tell you that because – and we kicked the students out of my class and they were –

This is a small school.

My blood pressure was up for a while

I’ve given my career too much of my time to have been treated this way and not have any repercussions for these students actions. It’s a shame and disgrace

it was just stress, more than anything.

My feelings were hurt and then I thought what if people believe all that stuff she is saying.

Stress always cost something but you may not know it at the time.
193 | I have also realized the power of the cyber world.

194 | I wish there were no such thing as being able to post anonymously on the Internet.

195 | The experience changed the security of keeping my home and myself safe.

196 | I am more diligent about locking doors and people possibly following me home, especially at night.

197 | I confronted the main culprit at school and asked her why she said all those mean things.

198 | She denied it not knowing I had seen it with my own eyes.

199 | She told her parents and friends I jumped on her for what she wrote on her Facebook page, which was a lie.

200 | I simply asked her about it in what I thought was a calm way.

201 | Then her parents wrote and called the school and the principal and even mounted a campaign to get me fired because I was gay—which I am not.

202 | I asked Jane why she wrote all those things on Facebook and she denied it.

203 | I did meet with my principal and assistant principal to let them know what was going on.

204 | Coworkers said I might need to get some legal counsel in case they fired me. But I didn’t.

205 | I was called lesbo, freak, mean, ugly—you name it I was called it.

206 | Someone said in a post that if I was a lesbian I didn’t need to be teaching school and setting a bad example for kids.

207 | Anytime you have a lot of stress, I think it affects your body and health.
I didn’t see a shrink or anything but I was on edge a lot more than I was before so yeah—I think it affected my health negatively—yeah in a bad way.

I started seeing a cardiologist.

It stressed me.

I missed four days of work in the hospital.

they did determine that it was just stress related.

I was nervous and I was worried. the only thing that I was really worried about is that it wouldn’t work out the way I had planned and then they would be right.

I felt distress, worry, agitated that something like this could happen.

being attacked in a moral way hurt me.

I am not a lesbian and if I were it is my business. I was nervous and I was worried.

the whole thing was embarrassing-----to be honest.

I stressed over it for a couple days. I was stressing over that more than anything that she was gonna be upset with me because I unfriended this little girl.

I did get an alarm system at my house. I did find it hard to sleep.

The school did not support me at all. It was like I was on my own with this one.

I could not think of anything else for weeks or even months after seeing online what was said about me.

I was – when I say I was shocked. I’m putting it mildly.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>223</td>
<td>I was very, very angry. I went to the – I even went through the trouble of going and seeing a lawyer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>224</td>
<td>It made me where I couldn’t sleep for a while, fortunately, I had a very supportive family, a very supportive husband,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>225</td>
<td>But it increased my stress level at work tremendously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>226</td>
<td>It damaged my working relationship with some of my coworkers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>227</td>
<td>It made anything that I did with my job more difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>228</td>
<td>I did miss two days of work because of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>229</td>
<td>And I did have to pay to have the postings removed from the website and that was it. I am a stronger person because of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230</td>
<td>They also discussed the fact that I enjoyed failing kids and that must be where I got my kicks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>231</td>
<td>Definitely refrained from that [public places or attending functions].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>232</td>
<td>In fact I probably saved more money because I didn’t leave the house much and I would go straight home after work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>233</td>
<td>Anything that stresses me stresses my family cause we are real close.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>234</td>
<td>I didn’t worry about how it would – I didn’t worry what people thought of my personal life because they knew me personally and they knew that I would never voluntarily be in any kind of picture or anything like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>235</td>
<td>I felt like a lot of people treated me differently because of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>236</td>
<td>And I had trouble like going to the grocery store, being out in public and really felt victimized when I’d done nothing wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>237</td>
<td>And I had to put extra effort into not treating other people different.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Text</td>
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<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>238</td>
<td>Yes, I was less likely to go out in public and tightened my ring of friends to a few close people I could trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>239</td>
<td>Not that I know of [no policy].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>240</td>
<td>Perhaps some professional development or an assembly so kids can't say they didn't know they couldn't say that stuff on the Internet about their teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>241</td>
<td>Schools need to do more to educate students and educators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>242</td>
<td>At first, but not so much anymore because I figure most of these kids don’t want adults seeing their pages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>243</td>
<td>I was hesitant about being seen at the grocery store and other places.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>244</td>
<td>Everybody I saw, I thought, have they read anything about me? Do they believe it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>245</td>
<td>Not to a big extent. at first anyway, every person I came in contact with I wondered if they read the stuff about me and what they were thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>246</td>
<td>I kinda shied away from large gatherings and tended to go to the grocery store later than usual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>247</td>
<td>If I ate out I would go through the drive thru window and take it home and eat it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>248</td>
<td>I became a hermit in my home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>249</td>
<td>I definitely wouldn’t go to ball games or anything going on at school unless I had to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250</td>
<td>It was like I would look around and wonder if the person sending me that junk was around.</td>
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<tr>
<td>251</td>
<td>I thought about it at ball games and the grocery store, the school, most everywhere I went.</td>
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<tr>
<td>252</td>
<td>I thought about it but it didn’t really keep me from going places. I said, what the heck,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Text</td>
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<tr>
<td>253</td>
<td>I’m not gonna give them the power to intimidate me into staying home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>254</td>
<td>A simple email can screw up your whole day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>255</td>
<td>I guess I was a bit more vigilant in watching what I said to students or people in the faculty lounge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>256</td>
<td>I didn’t know who was sending the emails so I didn’t cut up or make small talk as much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>257</td>
<td>In fact, a fellow teacher asked me if something was wrong.</td>
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<tr>
<td>258</td>
<td>I was being so quiet I guess.</td>
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<tr>
<td>259</td>
<td>In my classroom I do talk about social networking at the beginning of the year to all the students, that's one of the things that I do on the first day of school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>260</td>
<td>I tell them they really shouldn't be on [Facebook] until they're 13. So if you're on Facebook already you're breaking their rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>261</td>
<td>I am much more cautious around parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>262</td>
<td>People talking on a forum is not going to make me stop doing my job so I don’t know what their plan was.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>263</td>
<td>I was nervous and I was worried.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>264</td>
<td>I feel that my cyber harassment situation has made me more cautious about the relationships that I form with students, parents and co-workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>265</td>
<td>It has made me attentive to the actions of others who may seem like they are interested and helpful, but are not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>266</td>
<td>I wasn’t as worried about what people would think that saw it – it just so that I felt like – well, it made me question – it made me question why I became a teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>267</td>
<td>I had to go back and read evaluate why I became a teacher.</td>
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</table>
I really had to be careful after that, I felt like I had to be really careful about how I treated my students, how I reacted to students when they misbehave, particularly male students.

I would go around and if I saw other people in the school system, I would be like in the back of my head, I wondered if they seen that picture.

It was a little stressful with administration for a while because I had to put my foot down and at that point in time in my career I was not comfortable with that.

I just had to go in and say, “This is what I expect to happen.”

If you want to kick me out the door, fine, I’ll call an attorney.”

I felt like I had to work twice as hard to prove the insults wrong.

I had to look twice as good and be twice [pause] everything.

I was less likely to go to the teachers’ lounge, to hang in the hall with teachers talking.

I try to warn my students not to do that. I

I am more aware of the visibility of educator/student, educator/parent, educator/coworker relationships in the day and age of social media.

Nothing is secret or isolated.

I have because of that instance, I warn my students about what they put up – particularly using someone’s likeness without their knowledge.

I would not meet alone with the parent anymore..

I think there are still people who believe everything they hear or see. They think if it is on the Internet it must be true.

I felt like they attacked me for doing my job and being fair.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>283</td>
<td>I felt like I had to second guess every step I took in case someone misinterpreted it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>284</td>
<td>I kinda liked it when I had an appointment or was sick and didn’t have to face everyone at school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>285</td>
<td>I’ve always kinda kept to myself at school but I do more now than ever.</td>
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<tr>
<td>286</td>
<td>I do have a sounding board in a good friend of mine.</td>
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<tr>
<td>287</td>
<td>I didn’t really involve anyone else because the whole thing was Embarrassing…to be honest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>288</td>
<td>When you, when you’re being harassed by somebody whom you really don’t feel like you played a part, I mean, you don’t feel like – you’re just trying to do your job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>289</td>
<td>And it made work relations more difficult because coworkers viewed me differently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>290</td>
<td>Some believed it and it made it difficult to go to my boss about things that I would need to in my job because I didn’t want to be seen talking to him.</td>
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<tr>
<td>291</td>
<td>It made me more self-conscious about the way I dressed so that people wouldn’t look at me and think I would do things like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>292</td>
<td>It made it where I couldn’t sleep at night for a while.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>293</td>
<td>And I always felt like I needed to defend myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>294</td>
<td>I felt like I had to prove myself more to parents because I knew that many parents had read that, even probably some students had read it because it’s a small town.</td>
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<tr>
<td>295</td>
<td>My working life was, I became a little more withdrawn at work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>296</td>
<td>I never really – I didn’t go as far as thinking about quitting the teaching profession, but I did think about leaving the school system and moving somewhere else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>297</td>
<td>It made it where I couldn’t sleep at night.</td>
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<tr>
<td>298</td>
<td>I didn’t feel as confident about things that I had felt confident about – in before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>299</td>
<td>I had a lot of maybe self-doubt about things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>And it just made the stress at work a lot harder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>301</td>
<td>Everything I did was harder.</td>
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<tr>
<td>302</td>
<td>I am less likely to trust co-workers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>303</td>
<td>It has made it more difficult for me to trust co-workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>304</td>
<td>The end of the school year helped but it still there in the back of my mind and I don’t know if it is in the back of theirs or not.</td>
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<tr>
<td>305</td>
<td>I would have pushed for some type of punishment for the individual [and her little group] even if it were only an apology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>306</td>
<td>I am very cautious and evaluate every angle of the clothes I wear to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>307</td>
<td>Absolutely. make a conscious decision to do things to try to at least keep up my physical well-being, you know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>308</td>
<td>I never really knew who they were from so I don’t feel any resolution on knowing who it was. I still wonder that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>309</td>
<td>I felt I had shut all of that out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>310</td>
<td>I don’t know some much the zeal, but the fact that I always double think, or stop myself before I lean over to help somebody and more often now, I’ll make student come to my desk.</td>
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<tr>
<td>311</td>
<td>If anything I am more determined to do a good job and prove the insults about my ability to be the lies they were.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>312</td>
<td>No, I love my job.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
I love children, I love teaching, and I am not going to let someone bully me.

We have posters on the wall about bullying but not really about cyber bullying.

There is probably something in the student handbook about it but I am not sure.

We do some of the Olweus lessons and they have some parts about cyber bullying but mostly bullying.

They recognize it for silliness and hoped that there were no hard feelings and there weren’t.

I—can’t think of any. Not that I know of [eductor's cyber harassment policy].

No not that I know of [eductor's cyber harassment policy]

The only peace I have had with the administrator, or the peace I did have with the administrator, is at no point did he apologize,

I’m not aware of any apology for his language or his actions, So there was no reconciliation there.

The reconciliation is he’s gone.

Co-workers I think primarily and friends.

No. The parents of the students involved are really the only ones I’ve – and they, the parents were just apologetic.

And according to ____ charges cannot be brought against them because they never touched me and if they had not taken the pictures down when we ask them to, then that would have been classified as sexual harassment and charges could have been brought.

I did mainly discuss with my family.

But because they took them down when we asked them, we couldn’t bring charges.
| 328 | The counselor that was part time here was a really, really great |
| 329 | I didn’t discuss it with my pastor or go to the doctor or anything like that. |
| 330 | My husband and my family were my main sounding boards. |
| 331 | Nothing was ever done and nothing was ever really resolved. |
| 332 | I don’t think so. No, my school is big on anti-bullying but not much is said about cyberbullying. |
| 333 | No, I’m not. |
| 334 | Everyone thought it was not a good thing but I don’t know what else they could have done if they didn’t know who was sending them. |
| 335 | Yes, it resolved itself because the grandmother actually did what she should have done. |
| 336 | Nobody really did anything but they were nice about it to me. |
| 337 | They didn't really do anything but I guess that they did all they can do. |
| 338 | I think there needs to be much more parent supervision online. |
| 339 | And I think that any kids that sign up for Facebook or whatever, parents oughta be right there watching and seeing the password and looking and seeing what their kids are saying. |
| 340 | I'm not aware of any policies about Facebook or cyber bullying at all. |
| 341 | I’ve looked on the forum and there’s not any new posts |
| 342 | there were people in the school that really, really helped me. The families and parents of the children there were probably my biggest support. |
My husband is the one who listened to me all the time and he actually even said to me one time “this may not work because.” but there were people here that supported me.

I don’t have – even to this day I don’t have any way of knowing – I don’t – I mean, you know once something like this on the Internet, it’s there forever.

I finally I had to come to the conclusion in my own mind and for my own sake that just because this is a rural town and gossip and stuff spreads, that it probably could have happen in any school.

I brought that to the attention of our administration, their response is that “if it doesn’t happen at school then we can’t deal with it at all.” And so that’s kind of I guess where the policy stands.

I would have chosen the counsel of an attorney who wasn't related to anyone in the town.

No. And that was something that the lawyer whose counsel that I sought that summer asked me about--

I thought about even moving away. And had it continued I would have. I don’t feel like I got any resolution.

he [husband] was my strongest support and the one that got me through it. There was never anything positive on there, it was just a website to degrade people and hurt people.

And they did ask me to – the first time I’ve saw the lawyer they asked me to bring the teacher handbook and I brought that and we really couldn’t find much of anything in there.

And I was also told – and it wasn’t just because we didn’t really find a policy per se, as much about the cell phone –

I could almost feel the low morale on the part of other faculty members (particulary female) when we had faculty meetings.

I felt that the administration should have addressed this in a quicker and in a – in a strict manner. I don’t feel – I never felt like it was taken seriously enough. And I – that really – that bothered me.

No. I think that’s a shade of gray and I think it becomes an issue when that’s done outside of school, but it affects the school environment and it’s a shade of gray on what kind of authority the school has to act on that forum.

I remember other teachers coming by my room in private to lend me support or a word of encouragment because they felt bad that this happened.

I’m not aware of them. [cyber harassment policy]
<p>| | |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>358</td>
<td>I really was kind of told – do you want to stay in the school system and how much attention do you want to bring to yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>359</td>
<td>I don’t know of such a policy [cyber harassment policy]</td>
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<tr>
<td>360</td>
<td>I'm not aware of a policy here at school about it. Is there one?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>361</td>
<td>And how important – how important is staying in the system to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>362</td>
<td>There is none that I know of. [cyber harassment policy]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>363</td>
<td>Policy. I don’t know. I mean, I wonder now exactly what I’m aware of. I mean, I think I practice good – good practices, but I don’t know if that’s just common sense or if I’ve been instructed not to do that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>364</td>
<td>Not that I’m aware of. [cyber harassment policy]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>365</td>
<td>No [cyber harassment policy].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>366</td>
<td>If I knew who was doing it, it would be a lot easier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>367</td>
<td>I could handle the discipline of the person then.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>368</td>
<td>When you don’t know who it is I think it would be tough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>369</td>
<td>I sure would take it serious though after what I’ve gone through.</td>
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<tr>
<td>370</td>
<td>It could have been a lot worse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>371</td>
<td>I’ve read where people have to move to another town after stuff is put on the computer about them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>372</td>
<td>Lies, I mean.</td>
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<td>Line</td>
<td>Text</td>
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<td>373</td>
<td>I would advise educators that they do not have to be silent about it.</td>
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<td>374</td>
<td>No. I never felt like, what should have been done was done.</td>
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<tr>
<td>375</td>
<td>I wasn’t the only teacher that was targeted, since there were some other teachers and the building that were targeted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>376</td>
<td>Become familiar with your school district's policies on cell phone usage and face book accounts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>377</td>
<td>Well, I never had a Facebook account of my own, and I don't attend tend to – I don’t plan on having one.</td>
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<tr>
<td>378</td>
<td>I do not allow people to be – to text – I didn’t allow then for kids to be on their cell phones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>379</td>
<td>But as far as how it was not dealt with by the school and the school system,</td>
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<tr>
<td>380</td>
<td>Not really. one thing I’ve said to my students is because we do an entire unit on career investigation and job qualities and all that stuff and so we talk about privacy acts and those kind of things and I told them my little quote is that “if you can’t stand in front of a judge and say it then you should be writing it, you shouldn’t be typing it. Because it may come to that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>381</td>
<td>Not that I’m aware of, no policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>382</td>
<td>I work real hard on my job, too hard sometimes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>383</td>
<td>Make it a point to express your concerns to people in authority about vague wording, no rules, or rules in school or in employee handbooks that are unclear, particularly about cell phone usage, facebook accounts, and cyberbullying.</td>
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<tr>
<td>384</td>
<td>But I’m very, very watchful of kids and leery of kids – any things that look like they’re on the cell phone or anything at all;</td>
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<tr>
<td>385</td>
<td>I’m not at peace about that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>386</td>
<td>But I had to come to the conclusion that it is what it is.</td>
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<td>Line</td>
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<tr>
<td>387</td>
<td>I never volunteered to have my picture put in a yearbook anymore.</td>
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<tr>
<td>388</td>
<td>that experience has made me a little paranoid of that now.</td>
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<tr>
<td>389</td>
<td>I would take them seriously, and I think my own experience, you can’t imagine how that hurt, how hurtful that is, or how it will affect you until you experience it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>390</td>
<td>Our school hasn't been the most pleasant place to work in lately.</td>
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<tr>
<td>391</td>
<td>The kids in today's society are [pause] different.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>392</td>
<td>I love technology, it has made my job much more enjoyable but I don't like the dark side of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>393</td>
<td>I’ve always viewed myself as being strong and positive but that was a hard punch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>394</td>
<td>I would first listen, I would take them seriously, I would sympathize with the position that they were in and I would do what I could to help them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>395</td>
<td>It definitely changed how I view that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>396</td>
<td>It would have to be looked at on an individual basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>397</td>
<td>And I don’t allow any of my picture to be taken at work anymore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>398</td>
<td>No. Even though several employees have been cyber harassed by students and coworkers, there has never been any acknowledgment that that happens or professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>399</td>
<td>We did not go to a higher level, no. We just wanted it to go away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>I would encourage them not to let those who feed on gossip to lessen their opinion of themselves.</td>
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<tr>
<td>401</td>
<td>I’ve never had a Facebook account – in the educational program that I’m in now in higher education, it would benefit me to have a Facebook account, but because of that I don’t want to let people in on my private life or expose that to the Internet. So I do not have one.</td>
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</table>
It’s still hurtful to think about it. I moved on, I’ve changed the way I do things because of it. I would never approach my principal about any kind of concern I have to the school, I would go to him through a third party.

I would encourage any victim of cyber harassment to report it immediately to whatever level of authorities deemed appropriate, and pursue the matter until it is resolved to the satisfaction of the victim.

I won’t allow my husband to post pictures of me or my child and his Facebook page, just so yeah, have to be careful.

I took down my Facebook page.

Eventually I was and really, the main thing there was that I got some good advice from law enforcement.

That said, and they told me, you have to make sure that they understand that you understand if they don’t take care of this, you might not be able to sue the student but you can sue for a hostile work environment.

And the phrase, “Hostile work environment,” was what made things kind of go in line.

With pressure. One parent who I thought was the only one that did the right thing willingly pulled her child out of school and placed him in the alternative school for the remainder of this thing and assured me sent me an email that I would never have to have him in my classroom again.

First off, I wouldn’t pretend like it wasn’t a big deal.

I probably use technology more than most people and I love it.

And secondly, I would sit down from them right out the front and say, “what do you want to happen?”

What is – we’re going to start with at least what you want?

But I use the technology that I need as a tool.

I don’t have Facebook

One thing I have learned, sometimes when we pull something online for our whether it’s a YouTube video or something, I have learned to disable comments because people can comment anonymously.
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<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tr>
<td>417</td>
<td>Not that I’m aware of [cyber harassment policy]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>418</td>
<td>Which was – I really, really appreciated it. Otherwise, some parents were just very upset with me like I had done something because their child was banned from my classroom for the rest of their high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>419</td>
<td>because I don’t like anonymous communication. I have been burned on anonymous communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>420</td>
<td>I don’t have texting on my phone because I don’t want people texting me if they want to say something to me, you say something to me. Don’t hold it in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>421</td>
<td>Talk to the person who is harassing you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>422</td>
<td>Don’t think it is ok for them to treat you that way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>423</td>
<td>The school may not be able to help you much and you have a right to feel and be safe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>424</td>
<td>I sure am leery of email messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>425</td>
<td>I mean, I know our school accounts are private, but thank God they didn’t get my personal one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>426</td>
<td>I did make one of those after my ordeal so only my close friends know my personal email address.</td>
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<tr>
<td>427</td>
<td>Now I am, but I mean it took a while – it took me until that group of kids graduated and now I don’t have to see them anymore and I don’t think about it anymore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>428</td>
<td>I would also suggest they “make a bigger deal” about it than I did. Confront them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>429</td>
<td>Seems like they’ve been offered [prof development]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>430</td>
<td>Not that I know of [cyber harassment policy]...</td>
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</table>
Seek legal counsel if they think it would be necessary.

I did make a new email account for coupons and you know when they give you an additional amount off if you give them your email address?

Not that I know of [cyber harassment policy]..

Well, for one thing, I would believe them and take it seriously.

And then I would meet their needs.

Don't put up with it!!

I’d go straight to the person doing the harassing and present the information and say, you know, “Can you explain?”

we’ve got to remember that what is out there either on text, a voice mail, email, is a permanent mark.

I think that we could just pull everybody together and discuss it but if when we don’t know who they are it makes it very difficult.

My greatest advice to a fellow educator is to remain professional

Many people have a difficult time with harassment and want to seek revenge or justice themselves

Yeah, I’m not gonna let it affect my life to the point of ruining my life because I feel like, you know, that’s giving them the upper hand.

I still use the computer for what I need to see—or know.

Again, I think it goes back to if I was not as strong, I think, of a person —. It’s just that I got angry enough to say, “You’re not gonna back me in, in the corner, and ...”

I know what I’ve been through and it has been rough on me.
<p>| 447 | My advice would be to &quot;bring it into the light&quot;. |
| 448 | And that’s why I decided the only way to really let the world know what was really happening with this situation was to publicize it and publicize the truth. |
| 449 | I have found that it is best to remain professional and work hard to prove them wrong. |
| 450 | But I think that comes from the fact that my own personal faith and counseling and, you know, having supportive friends and family and, you know, I have sought that out. |
| 451 | Well they didn't really do anything. they didn’t really do anything so I can’t say they supported me one way or another. |
| 452 | I don’t really think it was technology’s fault that I was harassed. I do not allow any cell phone use in my room. |
| 453 | But does it still bother me--yes? I don’t like it that Jane could post all those lies without repercussion. I still feel like the victim.[What would need to occur for you not to feel like the victim?] I don’t really know. |
| 454 | I don’t know about peace. I guess I have. More than anything I’d like to know the ______ who sent me those emails. I’d just like to know if it was who I thought it was. |
| 455 | Definitely no camera use. |
| 456 | I am careful when I bend over or turn my back to the room. |
| 457 | I do not give my facebook account or phone number to students at all now. |
| 458 | Not that I'm aware of. [policy] |
| 459 | I would just assume that that comes under professional conduct or ethical conduct. |
| 460 | Somebody hacked my account and I haven't friended everybody that I was friends with before. |
| 461 | My account was sending porn to people. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>462</td>
<td>I took out all my student friends, and, you know what, some of them had their feelings hurt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>463</td>
<td>Yes, but I really do feel there needs to be a policy about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>464</td>
<td>I would contact the parents and have a meeting with the parents and the teacher and find out what was going on and find out why the harassment's going on and then tell them that if it continues that we're gonna have the legal authorities coming in because that doesn't need to be happening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>465</td>
<td>I just think that administrators would have to have a good handle on a policy that needs to be across the board for everybody and that parents need to be aware of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>466</td>
<td>I unfriended every student that was on Facebook that I knew or had that was still in the school system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>467</td>
<td>I'm real leery about getting parents of students on my Facebook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>468</td>
<td>I'm real picky about who I accept their friendship and if there's a name that comes up that I don't know and it's probably a parent of a kid in my classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>469</td>
<td>I took it off my page as soon as I saw it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>470</td>
<td>And I have unfriended some of your parents, in fact, I've unfriended all of your parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>471</td>
<td>If your parents want to get a hold of me they can email me at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>472</td>
<td>They have offered it to parents at some of the parent nights. I'm not aware that they've given the teachers any of that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>473</td>
<td>Right, and I would have gone the next step, I would have gone straight to the principal if nothing had been done because if that little girl had just stayed online and she had kept doing what she was doing because she didn't stop when I said, &quot;If you don't stop this harassment, I'm gonna be reporting you.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>474</td>
<td>I would have had a police officer in the room when we had the parent conference to let the parents know what they did was illegal. I would also request the student be removed from my room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>475</td>
<td>If a student messages me I answer and we communicate that way but I am no longer friends with students until they graduate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>476</td>
<td>I would have had a police officer in the room when we had the parent conference to let the parents know what they did was illegal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>477</td>
<td>I am not friends with students on Facebook the only social network that I am on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>478</td>
<td>There should be. [policy]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>479</td>
<td>The internet's not going away and the problems are only going to compound as time goes on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>480</td>
<td>I would also request the student be removed from my room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>481</td>
<td>My parents would have tanned my hide if I was disrespectful to a teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>482</td>
<td>It seems harder for adults to keep up with all the new technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>483</td>
<td>I shouldn't have let 'em get off so easy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>484</td>
<td>My principal said to just let it go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>485</td>
<td>I wanted to cawl in the bed and pull the covers over my head. No I wanted to crawl under the bed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Selected Significant Statements

- With the administrator, (I did) not necessarily (feel) fear, but definitely distress and anger and hurt. I felt harassed.

- And I think if I would have been a lesser person as far as if I would’ve been meeker in that situation, it definitely could’ve been worse. But, I definitely took a stand and defended myself as much as I possibly could despite the discomfort.

- It was retaliation because the administrator wanted to handle the situation one way, and I, because of what I believed to be sound legal advice, felt like it needed to be handled another way, strictly for protocol and procedure.

- I think he did it to intimidate me into agreeing with him, make me afraid of him and afraid of the situation so I would just give in.

- Well, definitely, both were intimidating, both wanted me to do what it was they wanted done. They were both bullies.

- It, it took….its very time-consuming. I think it takes a lot of productivity out. It takes something out of you that I think is unfair in schools because we’re there for all children, not just one. But, when one parent and one student monopolizes all of your time, then you’re obviously not gonna do as good of a job with all your other parents and students.

- There was definitely avoidance of activities. And, avoidance of going places for me.

- I have definitely made changes as far as publicizing any private information.
My Facebook account is very private. I try not to allow access to those particular people.

- Its made me very leery. I’m not as trusting of people as I think I would’ve been otherwise.

- *Did you think about changing your employment?* Yes, for both. I think stress can take its toll on you physically and otherwise. And I have watched other people in my position….I’ve watched them go downhill physically. I have had to make a conscious decision to do things to try at least keep up my physical wellbeing, you know? I’ve had to be much more conscientious. But I’ve seen other people in this position, they go gray quicker, they get more wrinkled….they, they age faster. And so, yes, I’ve thought about doing something differently to have less stress.

- I felt threatened. I felt threatened that she was spreading rumors about me, not just that - she was confronting me about my beliefs.

- I just wanted her (harasser’s parent) to be aware that this little girl was just doing whatever she felt like doing on the Internet and nobody was paying attention to it.

- I stressed over it for a couple of days and I kept wondering, “Is the parent going to be upset with me because I unfriended this little girl?”

- Not many parents, I think, are checking up on what their kids are doing online. I think there needs to be much more parent supervision online. And, I think that any kids that sign up for Facebook or whatever, parents oughta be right there watching and seeing the password and looking and seeing what their kids are
• No, I recognize it for what it was. No, I think there was no ill intent – I wasn’t necessary offended. I just didn’t want it to go any further.

• So it’s - it’s ongoing, never-ending harassment.

• I was distressed first, I was ticked off, then I was embarrassed and then because of the way politics works in a small school system, I – my husband’s biggest fear was if you cause a stink you’ll lose your job. And that was the big fear in our family – if you pitch too much of a fit over this, then you might lose your job.

• They were kids that were, I guess, used to getting away with stuff. And I didn’t let them get away with stuff. So that could be it. But I don’t know.

• Yeah, I was embarrassed. My blood pressure was up for a while. It was just stress more than anything.

• I think twice now - and this has been a few years ago - before I go over and help a kid, which is sad. I’m always thinking, ‘Is there a kid in the room that’s going to do something stupid?’

• I took down my Facebook page. I won’t allow my husband to post pictures of me or my child on his Facebook page, just so, yeah, you have to be careful.

• It was a little stressful with administration or a while because I had to put my foot down and, at that point in time in my career, I was not comfortable with that. I just had to go in and say, ‘This is what I expect to happen. If you want to kick me out the door, fine, I’ll call my attorney.’ And so that was difficult because I never really had to stand up for myself in that way before.
• I just felt like – I had been literally slapped in the face.

• And so I am – I was – when I say I was shocked, I’m putting it mildly. I was very, very angry. I even went to the through the trouble of going and seeing a lawyer.

• Oh yeah, it was a way of rebelling, I guess.

• But all I had was their (administration) word. See, I don’t have – even to this day I don’t have any way of knowing – I mean, you know once something like this is on the Internet it’s there forever.

• I never felt like what should have been done was done.

• I wasn’t as – I wasn’t as worried about what people would think that saw it – it just so that I felt like – well, it made me question – it made me question why I became a teacher. I had to go back and reevaluate why I became a teacher and I’ll have to say this, and I don’t want anyone to take this the wrong way, but in one way I kind of felt like it was a double whammy. I felt that the administration should have addressed this in a quicker and in a stricter manner. I don’t feel – I never felt like it was taken seriously enough. And that really bothered me.

• And I really had to be careful after that. I felt like I had to be really careful about how I treated my students, how I reacted to students when they misbehaved, particularly male students. I had to go back and reevaluate, you know, well I cannot allow a few bad seeds – a few bad kids – to affect the ones that are good.

<emotional>

• For a while, I would go around and if I saw other people in the school system, it
would be like in the back of my head, I wondered if they had seen that picture.

- I feel at peace, as far as why I became a teacher and I’m in it for the long haul and that kind of thing. But, as far as how it was dealt with by the school and the school system, I’m not at peace about that.

- I had to come to the conclusion that it is what it is. And if I wanted to continue to work in this system – I didn’t go as far as thinking about quitting the teaching profession, but I did think about leaving the school system and moving somewhere else.

- They attacked me online – never to my face. They were too much of a coward to do that.

- I am definitely more aware. I do not allow any cell phone use in my room. Definitely no camera use. I am careful when I bend over or turn my back to the room. Isn’t that sad?

- I felt distress, worry, agitated that something like this could happen.

- I felt like they attacked me for doing my job and being fair. Plus, being attacked in a moral way hurt me. I am not a lesbian and, if I were, it is my business.

- I hate it that kids can put in writing something on the Internet that is one-sided and I don’t have a chance to voice my side of the situation.

- I was very distressed and my main concern was it would harm or hurt my family because I didn’t want them to be embarrassed.

- It made work relations more difficult because coworkers viewed me differently. Some believed it and it made it difficult to go to my boss about things that I would need to in my job because I didn’t want to be seen talking to him. It
made me more self-conscious about the way I dressed so that people couldn’t
look at me and think I would do things like that. It made it where I couldn’t
sleep at night for a while.

- It made anything to do with my job more difficult. I felt like I had to prove
  myself more to parents because I knew that many parents had read it because
  it’s a small town. And, I always felt like I needed to defend myself.
- I felt like a lot of people treated me differently because of it. And I had to put
  extra effort into not treating other people differently.
- I felt victimized when I’d done nothing wrong.
- Sometimes I think people just are mean and they get satisfaction from being
  mean.
- Even though several employees have been cyber harassed by students and
  coworkers, there has never been any acknowledgement (by school
  administration) that it happened or provided any professional development.
- It definitely changed how I view (Facebook). I’ve never had a Facebook
  account – in the educational program that I’m in now in higher education, it
  would benefit me to have a Facebook account, but because of that I don’t want
  to let people in on my private life or expose that to the internet.
- I didn’t really feel fear but I did feel like I was kind of attacked professionally,
  like I didn’t know what I was doing, like people were questioning my judgment,
  questioning my character.
- I was nervous and I was worried.
- I’ve had students come to me and say so and so has said this about me, just
blatantly on Facebook or tweeted something specifically. And when I brought that to the attention of our administration, their response was, “If it doesn’t happen at school, then we can’t deal with it at all.”

- And one thing I’ve said to my students, because we do an entire unit on career investigation and job qualities and all that stuff and so we talk about privacy acts and those kinds of things, and I tell them, “If you can’t stand in front of a judge and say it then you shouldn’t be writing it…you shouldn’t be typing it…because it may come to that.”

- I was worried and nervous after (the emails) got more graphic and suggestive.

- Anytime you have a lot of stress, I think it affects your body and health.

- I did find it hard to sleep.

- Until this past year I would have said I thought of mainly teenagers, but not anymore.

- I was hesitant about being seen at the grocery store and other places. Everybody I say, I thought, ‘Have they read anything about me? Do they believe it?’

- Stress always costs something but you may not know it at the time.

- The people who know me know the truth about me. But I would be lying if, at first anyway, every person I came in contact with I wondered if they read the stuff about me and what they were thinking.

- I shied away from large gatherings and tended to go to the grocery store later than usual. That was only when things were at their peak, you know, when she first started saying things and everyone was buzzing about it.

- No, I love my job. I love children. I love teaching, and I am not going to let
someone bully me into thinking otherwise. I guess I am stubborn like that.

- I felt like I had to work twice as hard to prove the insults wrong. I had to look twice as good and be twice…..everything.

- I was less likely to go to the teachers’ lounge, to hang in the hall with teachers talking. I was new in the school plus (I was) having bad things said about me behind my back. It was a no-win situation.
According to our February 2012 survey, 80% of American adults use the internet. Here are some of the things they do online:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internet activities (all)</th>
<th>% internet users who do this</th>
<th>Survey Month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use a search engine to find information</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>February 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send or read e-mail</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>August 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for info on a hobby or interest</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>August 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for a map or driving directions</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>August 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check the weather</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for health/medical info~</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for information online about a service or product you are thinking of buying*</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get news</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go online just for fun or to pass the time</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>August 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy a product</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch a video on a video-sharing site like YouTube or Vimeo</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for info about someone you know or might meet*</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for &quot;how-to,&quot; &quot;do-it-yourself&quot; or repair information</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>August 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit a local, state or federal government website*</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use an online social networking site like MySpace, Facebook or LinkedIn.com*</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>February 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy or make a reservation for travel</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do any banking online</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look online for news or information about politics*</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>August 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look online for info about a job*</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for information on Wikipedia</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use online classified ads or sites like Craigslist</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get news or information about sports*</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>January 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a virtual tour of a location online</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>August 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do any type of research for your job</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>March 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upload photos to a website so you can share them with others online</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send instant messages</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>December 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay to access or download digital content online*</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>August 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for info about a place to live*</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>August 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download music files to your computer</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>December 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get financial info online, such as stock quotes or mortgage interest rates</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate a product, service or person using an online rating system</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play online games*</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categorize or tag online content like a photo, news story or blog post</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>December 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read someone else’s online journal or blog^*</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for religious/spiritual info</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post a comment or review online about a product you bought or a service you received</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post comments to an online news group, website, blog or photo site</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share something online that you created yourself</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research your family’s history or genealogy online*</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download video files to your computer</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>December 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in an online auction</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a donation to a charity online</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a phone call online, using a service such as Skype or Vonage</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>August 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in an online discussion, a listserv, or other online group forum that helps people with personal issues or health problems*</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>December 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download a podcast so you can listen to it or view it later*</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View live images online of a remote location or person, using a webcam</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create or work on webpages or blogs for others,</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>including friends, groups you belong to, or for work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take material you find online—like songs, text or images—and remix it</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>May 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>into your own artistic creation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download or share files using peer-to-peer file-sharing networks, such</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>August 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as BitTorrent or LimeWire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sell something online</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create or work on your own webpage</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>January 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create or work on your own online journal or blog*</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Twitter</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>August 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy or sell stocks, bonds, or mutual funds</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use an online dating website*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit virtual worlds such as Second Life</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking surveys (March 2000 – February 2012). Please note that the wording for some items has been abbreviated. For full question wording, please refer to the questionnaire.

While this list contains many of the activities the Pew Internet Project has asked about, it is not a comprehensive list. For a complete list of our activity tracking since 2000 please refer to the Usage Over Time spreadsheet.

* Item wording has changed slightly over time for the items marked with a single asterisk. Please see questionnaires for question wording.

~Based on a series of questions about specific health topics.

Last updated: February 2012