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# 500 million frenemies: a phenomenological study of the prevalence and perceptions of female students and male students as it relates to cyber bullying on social networking websites

Dana Manzi-Schaed

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**500 MILLION FRENEMIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE  
PREVALENCE AND PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE STUDENTS AND  
MALE STUDENTS AS IT RELATES TO CYBER BULLYING  
ON SOCIAL NETWORKING WEBSITES.**

by  
Dana Manzi-Schaed

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Leadership  
College of Education  
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For the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at  
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Dissertation Chair: Robert B. Campbell, Ed.D.

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful family, with which I am so blessed. My beautiful children, Grace and William: you were both born while I was in the process of completing this degree. I hope you see that anything is possible with hard work and commitment and to never ever give up on your dreams – no matter how tired or sleep deprived you may be! There is no big secret to life. You have a goal and you do the work to achieve it.

To my husband, David: For all of those Saturdays I was in class or working, thank you for always supporting my dream. From the first day I met you, you have always believed in me more than I have myself and made me feel that anything is possible. You are a wonderful husband and father and I feel lucky just to know you.

To my mom, dad, John, Jen, and Katie... whenever I felt like giving-up I would think of you all and your words of encouragement over the years. I am blessed to know all of you.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to all of the girls and boys who have been a victim of someone else's hurtful words and actions. Believe that it will get better and that you deserve to be happy, and please know that the world is better just because you are here.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to first thank my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Robert Campbell. Over the years you have given me wonderful advice and words of encouragement and made me feel that you never doubted that I could get this done as long as I kept pounding the rock! To Dr. Jo Ann Manning, I will never forget after I completed Benchmark II you said to me that you looked forward to reading my first article in the future. I can't tell you how much joy that statement brought me! Thank you also to Dr. Christy Thompson for serving on my committee.

## **Abstract**

Dana Manzi-Schaed

**500 MILLION FRENEMIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE  
PREVALENCE AND PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE STUDENTS AND  
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ON SOCIAL NETWORKING WEBSITES**

2012

Robert B. Campbell, Ed.D.  
Educational Leadership

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to discover the lived experiences of male and female high school students regarding cyber bullying on social networking websites. Previous research has shown that male and female students have very different experiences with traditional bullying; the current phenomenon of cyber bullying has yet to be widely researched. In addition, this research sought to better understand what, if any, the gender differences were in how students perceive adult prevention of cyber bullying as well as how both genders behave in informing adults of instances of cyber bullying. The goal of this research was to ultimately uncover the lived experiences of male and female students regarding cyber bullying so as to meet each gender's needs in future bullying intervention programs.

The participants consisted of 10 males and 10 females from population of 1,010 students; the main source of data came from a series of short and focused interviews. The research design allowed for a more detailed description of how males and females experience cyber bullying, but did not aim to answer why they had different experiences regarding cyber bullying. Instead, a description of their experiences was revealed and interpretations and meaning to describe this phenomenon were deduced.

This research gives a voice to all children who are subjected to cyber bullying and portrays the humanistic side of the issue.

Overall, this study revealed that the majority of females feel that cyber bullying on social networking websites is a common occurrence among other females. In accordance with traditional bullying patterns, female cyber bullies often socially isolate and gossip about their victims through the medium of social networking websites. In addition, male students also follow the traditional bullying patterns, as male on male cyber bullying begin by targeting victims online with words or pictures, with most situations inevitably leading to a physical altercation. Both male and female students reported there is little to no adult intervention regarding cyber bullying, and they would most often report incidents of bullying abuse to their guidance counselors. This study reaffirmed the notion that male and female students experience different levels and styles of cyber bullying, which should be reflected in future intervention programs.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Contextual Framework**

“Giving people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.”

Facebook corporate motto.

MISSYGIRL: You are such a loser and a fat cow why don't you just drop dead!

SOCCEGIRL: Who is this? What's your problem?

MISSYGIRL: You are and you better watch your back tomorrow at school!

#### **Introduction**

With the media and current politicians giving more and more attention to the topic of cyber bullying as well as the legal ramifications imposed on all levels of school employees to prevent and stop cyber bullying, policies and laws are being overhauled to meet the needs of this growing epidemic. However, due to the fact that cyber bullying is a relatively new issue with limited academic research, in order to combat the cyber bullying and to prevent students from being cyber bullied more research must be done on the phenomenon of cyber bullying, particularly from the perspective of the students themselves.

This dissertation will study male and female perceptions of cyber bullying as well as reporting patterns of students. The following chapter provides a detailed description of the context of this study, the questions that this research aims to answer, as well as the significance of this research.

Since the issue of cyber bullying is currently a hot topic among politicians and main stream media, a section on the political environment surrounding cyber bullying is included in this chapter. Key terms are defined as well as a brief discussion of the limitations of this study.

### **Larger Context**

Anonymity, insults, and threats. This type of communication is all too common to adolescents on social networking sites. It is common knowledge that bullying is a serious issue in schools all over the world. Victims of bullying are stripped of their right to feel safe in their own school, as well as their private lives. Effects of bullying can last a lifetime; often times leaving emotional scars which haunt victims forever (Mebane, 2010). With the advent of new technological advances and the growing accessibility of computers and cell phones, young people now have the fodder to increase their collaborative learning experience. While new and increased electronic communication clearly enhances the educational environment, more and more students are abusing this technology and using it to cyber bully other students (Gillespie, 2006).

Students' home lives are now simply an extension of the school day, with both their friends and enemies allowed to enter anytime of day or night via their computers and cell phones. While the typical victim of a traditional school-bully has some sense of escape when they go home, the cyber bully victim can be tormented 24 hours per day, seven days a week.

Although most administrators and teachers recognize that traditional bullying is an ongoing issue among young people, the educational field has yet to catch-up with the technological field in terms of preventing cyber-harassment (Beran & Li, 2005).

One of the major reasons for this is because while traditional bullying in schools is overt and more likely to be witnessed by others, cyber bullying is covert and anonymity makes tracking down the bully more difficult (Beran & Li). A 2003 study conducted by Nelson revealed that people view the Internet as an impersonal medium where they can say whatever they want to without any repercussions. Nelson (2003) concluded that female students actually preferred this type of bullying for the anonymity component.

In a 2006 study conducted by the Anti-Bullying Alliance (Bullying Prevention, 2009) researchers explained that there is a greater chance that cyber bullying will occur outside of school rather than inside of school. This fact makes it even more complex for school personnel to have accurate insight into the severity of the problem.

While there are countless teacher training workshops on creating the 21st Century learner and infusing technology into lesson plans, there are significantly less teacher training opportunities in such areas as preventing and recognizing cyber bullying (Li, 2007). In addition to the lack of awareness by school officials, there is also lack of research involving cyber bullying. This deficit in both fields is directly contributing to the increasing severity of cyber bullying (Li).

One has to simply turn on the evening news to see yet another cyber bullying case involving people of all ages. While cyber bullying is a new phenomenon, the effects of it on victims are rapid and at times deadly. It is up to school leaders to provide quality prevention programs and training to their teachers.

## **Political Environment**

Bullying has been cast in the national spotlight with media and policy-makers calling attention to the issue. The New Jersey Bullying Bill of Rights law was pushed through the policymaking process at a rapid pace as there was a public outcry for a call to action after the suicide of Tyler Clementi, an 18 year old Rutgers University student who committed suicide after his roommate secretly posted an online video of a sexual encounter between Clementi and another male. The information below will provide a brief synopsis as to the other legislation and policies that exist or are in the policy making process.

**Federal level.** In October 2010, New Jersey Senator Frank Lautenberg spoke at a Rutgers University memorial for Tyler Clementi, promising to push a stronger anti-bullying law through legislation (Hipkowski & Newill, 2011). While there were other community groups and politicians in attendance, the discussion focused on the issue of discrimination and bullying of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth. Tyler Clementi's death brought bullying into the national as well as state spotlights (Hipkowski & Newill).

While there is not a current federal anti-bullying law, on October 26, 2010, the United States Department of Education sent a letter to every school district in America explaining the different forms of bullying and the fact that they are considered to be a violation of a victim's civil rights (Ali, 2010). The letter specifically addresses harassment issues that involve race, color, national origin, sex, and disability, and provides scenarios of each explaining what the appropriate course of action by the school should be.

The letter explains that those students who are bullied on the basis that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender also fall under the category of a violation of Title IX, which prohibits sexual discrimination. The letter concludes by encouraging school district leaders to review the current anti-discriminatory laws that are implemented by the Office of Civil Rights. The letter does not make any mention of the mode of bullying as in cyber bullying or other types of bullying, rather the main focus is on type of bullying relating to race, color, national origin, sex, and disability (Manzi-Schaed, 2011).

On March 10, 2011, President Obama hosted the first White House Conference on Bullying Prevention. The conference focused on discussion as to how to bring teachers, parents, and policymakers together to create partnerships in a joint effort to combat bullying (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Data presented at the conference revealed that nearly one-third of all students in American schools are bullied each year, which equates to about 13 million students. The possible effects of being bullied were cited as poor academic performance, abuse of drugs and alcohol, and physical and mental health issues (Manzi-Schaed, 2011).

Five anti-bullying Bills were presented to Congress in 2011, all of which are currently being reviewed by various subcommittees for approval. New Jersey Senator, Frank Lautenberg introduced the Tyler Clementi High Education Anti-Harassment Act, which emphasizes that cyber bullying is a form of harassment and requires universities and colleges to create programs that prevent the harassment of students (Manzi-Schaed, 2011).

A 2007 national study conducted by the Department of Justice (Seely, Tombari, Bennett, & Dunkle, 2009) on bullying found that an average of 32 percent of adolescents

in America will be bullied at some point during any given school year. The report concluded that cyber bullying, due to the damaging nature, should be given special attention ("Bullying prevention," 2009)

**State.** A 2009 New Jersey Department of Education survey revealed that 17 percent of New Jersey students in high school had been cyber bullied within the past school year. Twenty-one percent of those students stated that they had been bullied on school grounds within the last school year (New Jersey Department of Education, 2009). With the recent media attention and call to action from public leaders, celebrities, and parents, many states, such as New Jersey, created or are in the process of creating stricter bullying laws that hold school districts more accountable for incidents of bullying (Manzi-Schaed, 2011).

In 2010, after the death of Tyler Clementi, the policy window opened and the New Jersey Legislation streamlined a new Bill. Signed into law in November 2010, the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights, which replaces the 2002 anti-bullying law, now identifies bullying as a civil rights issue (New Jersey Legislature 2010-2011a). This new law mandates that public school district leaders train all school staff members to identify and immediately address incidents of bullying. The specific mandates of the law are to be implemented in the 2011/2012 school year (Manzi-Schaed, 2011).

Among some of the major changes from the old bullying law are: all public schools must now institute a school safety team devoted to reviewing complaints of bullying, administrators must investigate bullying incidents or else face disciplinary infractions, school employees must report bullying incidents that they are aware of which

took place in or out of school, and school report card documents will contain the school's statistics on bullying and harassment incidents (Manzi-Schaed, 2011).

The new law does not give special consideration to cyber bullying, rather it identifies it as a component of traditional bullying and fails to provide additional information as to the complexities of preventing cyber bullying. There is no delineation in the investigation of traditional and cyber bullying as school leaders are instructed to investigate and treat both types of bullying in the same manner, regardless if the bullying occurred on campus or off-campus. Multiple research studies have shown that these two types of bullying are not the same and should be handled differently (Beale & Hall, 2007; Mason, 2008; Willard, 2008).

**State-by-state comparison.** As result of the 2011 National Bullying Convention, anti-bullying policy recommendations were made in the form of a "Dear Colleague" letter to every district in America. With certain types of bullying now triggering calls for civil rights action against the offenders and schools, 45 states have already passed laws which address bullying and harassment in schools (Duncan, 2010). The federal government has offered each state leader recommendations and information on what other states are doing to combat bullying, but ultimately the state officials are to determine which policies and laws are introduced regarding bullying prevention (Manzi-Schaed, 2011).

Information currently posted on the U.S. Department of Education (2010) website, lists the states which are considered to be exemplary in their bullying policies. Florida, Washington, Georgia, and Massachusetts are listed as having effective laws which provide such components as defining and clearly covering cyber bullying, utilizing school personnel to combat bullying, prohibiting retaliation, and providing training to staff

members to identify and respond to bullying (Manzi-Schaed, 2011). These policies are noted as having components such as internal and external stakeholder involvement, appropriate consequences for bullies, and clear and consistent visions regarding combating all forms of bullying.

A 2010 press release, currently posted on the U.S. Department of Education website, stated that the U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and other officials were in the process of compiling a state-by-state comparative analysis of how anti-bullying laws are implemented and created in an effort to provide state leaders with more resources. At the time this dissertation was written, said comparison data were not yet available.

**Local context.** The school that was studied for this dissertation was a middle-class Catholic high school in New Jersey with a population of 1,010 students in grades 9 through 12. According to the organizational structure of the school that is posted in its' policy book, the guidance and administration departments are in charge of handling bullying issues. The guidance department has the responsibility of providing the students with the tools and resources necessary to combat bullying. The students are informed through various methods such as the policy book, school website, and school posters to report bullying to their guidance counselor or any member of the administration.

As a member of the subject school's administration for three years, it is evident to me that very few students actually report bullying to any of the four members of the administration. The guidance department supervisor has reported to me that during the 2009-2010 school year, a total of 20 students reported some type of bullying to their guidance counselor.

During the 2008-2009 school year, approximately 32 students reported being bullied to their guidance counselor. Upon reviewing the discipline referrals for the 2009-2010 school year, I found that 150 of the documented dean's office discipline referrals, as reported by students and faculty, involved some form of cyber bullying.

My analysis of the 2008-2009 school year, revealed that 200 of the documented discipline referrals involved some type of cyber bullying. The dean in charge of discipline often deals with the issues of cyber bullying as they occur in a reactive style, since the majority of bullying conflicts begin outside of school and carry into school. The guidance department is technically in charge of updating the bullying policy and creating preventative strategies that teachers can use within their lessons; it is apparent that there is a disconnect.

The current bullying policy at the high school studied states that the,

School is committed to providing a safe and productive learning environment. Bullying of a student by another student is strictly prohibited on school property, in the school building, on school buses, and at school-sponsored events and/or activities whether occurring on or off campus.

Since the school is private, it does not have to follow the New Jersey Anti-Bullying law.

However, Bill A3282, which would include nonpublic schools and incidents occurring off school grounds in the current school bullying law was presented to the New Jersey

Legislature and is now being reviewed by the Assembly Education Commissioner (New Jersey Legislature, 2010-2011b).

### **Purpose Statement**

The goal of this phenomenological study was to understand the differences as well as the similarities in the experiences and perceptions of male and female students regarding cyber bullying on social networking websites. It is only after the problem is

analyzed through the eyes of the students that more appropriate bullying intervention programs can be developed that meet the needs of both male and female victims. Levels of reporting abuse to adults were also examined, as educators and parents are a child's main defense in combating bullying. The data from this research will aide bullying prevention program creators, educators, and ultimately victims of cyber bullying.

### **Proposal of Change**

Since students are reluctant to report cyber bullying to their guidance counselors and to the administration, there needs to be a study that examines the perceptions of students regarding cyber bullying to discover how prevalent the problem is. Gender differences in cyber bullying experiences need to be examined as well so that a more appropriate bullying intervention program can be developed that will meet the needs of both female and male students. This research will aim to make suggestions as to what components should exist in future anti-bullying policies and programs as well as measures to ensure that both female and male students' experiences with cyber bullying are considered. I will also include information as to how the school leaders can go about changing the current culture in the building so that all members of the faculty are committed to preventing all forms of bullying.

### **Reasoning for Research**

While there has been extensive research on the topic of gender differences regarding traditional bullying, as stated earlier, there is a gap in similar studies involving cyber bullying. A common theme in gender-specific bullying is that males engage in more physical acts of bullying while females are more inclined to participate in indirect forms such as social isolation and gossiping (Garbarino, 2006). Male students place more

importance on appearing physically strong and masculine, while female students place more importance on appearing socially accepted by their peers (Garbarino).

Therefore, an argument can be made based on the information presented above, that there is a need for more research to determine how gender plays a role in cyber bullying. Since males cannot physically cyber bully another person, more research needs to be conducted to discover what their experiences are with cyber bullying. In addition, there is a lack of consistent data indicating if females do in fact continue to socially isolate and gossip about others via the Internet (Beran & Li, 2005; Borg, 1999; Willard, 2007).

In a peer support intervention study conducted by Cowie and Olafsson (2000), gender differences were one of the methods that students use to combat peer aggression. Cowie and Olafsson noted that males and females have different perspectives regarding the value placed on social relationships. While most males conceal their ability to empathize for others and instead appear more masculine, female students aim to comfort and nurture others who are being bullied.

The research results from studies on cyber bullying involving gender differences are inconsistent at best. A 2006 study revealed that females are more likely to cyber bully others than males are (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2006). While a 2007 study found that there were no significant gender differences in terms of cyber bullying (Raskauskas & Stolz, 2007).

**Bullying effects.** A 2010 study by Mebane found that victims of bullying during their adolescent years were more likely to experience long term feelings of depression, low self-esteem, and social anxiety once the victims entered college. The severity and frequency of bullying that a victim experiences, the more likely that the trauma will follow

the victim into their adulthood. Additionally, the students who reported high levels of bullying during their adolescent years were more likely to have symptoms of post traumatic stress syndrome and greater psychological distress (Mebane, 2010).

In a 2006 study conducted by Gladstone, Parker, and Malhi, the correlation between childhood bullying and adult depression was studied. Of the 226 men and women who participated in the study, all of whom were bullied as adolescents, 76.1 percent answered that being bullied had ultimately changed who they were. The participants also reported current levels of high anxiety as a result of being bullied.

It is important to emphasize that the effects of cyber bullying can be so much more harmful to a young person than traditional bullying can (Willard, 2006). Typically, a victim of traditional bullying has an escape, as at the end of the school day he or she will be home away from the bullying. On the other hand, victims of cyber bullying can be targeted any time of day or night in their own home. Since most young people today spend many hours connected online via their cell phones or computers, victims of cyber bullying would literally have to disconnect from their peers in order to escape cyber bullies (Gillis, 2006).

Long-term effects of being cyber bullied can range from physical, mental, and emotional ailments (Willard, 2006). Since cyber bullying is a relatively new phenomenon, preliminary research on long-term effects specifically indentify anxiety, anger, feelings of low self-worth, depression, and suicide (Willard). The fact that cyber bullies can reach a larger audience, post embarrassing photographs, and videos of their victims, can leave the victim feeling helpless as to how to remove the hurtful content from the Internet.

**Reason for the change.** While there is extensive literature on the subject of traditional bullying, there is a gap in the literature on the topic of cyber bullying among adolescents on social networking websites. There are numerous studies that gage which websites students spend the most time on when they are online; there is a minimal amount of research on the issue of cyber bullying online (Gillis, 2006). Teacher workshops aimed at implementing technology into the curricula often make no mention of the frequent misuse of technology by students. While research has shown that just because most teenagers are well-versed in utilizing the Internet and social networking sites, does not necessarily mean that they know of the misuses of it (Braender, Kapp, & Years, 2009; Englander & Schank, 2010). A 2005 study by Campbell suggested more professional development for educators should be implemented in schools. Teachers should be fully aware of what cyber bullying is, as well as the consequences of being cyber bullied are to the victim.

**Social networking websites.** Social networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace have millions of members, with 60% of MySpace members under the age of 25, and 46% of all Facebook users under the age of 25 (Lorica, 2008). Since the average age of a school administrator is 50 years old, one could suggest that the students and the leaders of the school live in two separate worlds (Lorica).

As belonging to social networking websites such as Facebook become more and more a part of the social norm of being a teenager, so too must the research studies which examine the possible detrimental effects of these websites on children.

A 2007 study by Kowolaski and Limber, which examined the medium through which adolescents cyber bully, suggested that more detailed research be conducted

specifically regarding social networking websites. Furthermore, the researchers suggest that more studies be conducted to discover how likely students are to report being cyber bullied to an adult.

### **Research Questions**

This research aims to investigate the following research questions:

1. How do female students describe their experiences on the issue of cyber bullying on social networking websites as well as their perception of the prevalence of it?
2. How do male students describe their experiences on the issue of cyber bullying on social networking websites as well as their perception of the prevalence of it?
3. What, if any, are the gender differences in student perceptions regarding adults' prevention of cyber bullying on social networking websites?
4. When cyber bullying does occur on social networking websites, do male and female students act differently in terms of reporting abuse to adults?

### **Significance of the Research**

As previously stated, because cyber bullying is a new phenomenon, there is gap in the research field on the topic. The purpose of this study is to examine and compare the perceptions and prevalence of cyber bullying on social networking websites through the perceptions of male and female students. The data will reveal the prevalence of the issue through their lived experiences.

According to the National Organization for Victim Assistance (2010), while cyber bullying occurs everywhere, social networking websites are among the most common

medium (2010). This research will provide valuable data to developers of bullying intervention programs, teacher preparedness programs, and future anti-bullying policy development.

### **Scope of Study**

The initial sample for this study consisted of 10 female students and 10 male students, all students from the same New Jersey Catholic High School and all active members of a social networking website.

### **Defining Terms**

There are varying definitions of cyber bullying among theorists, with the most common definition explained by Willard (2007) as, "Being cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of social aggression using the Internet or other digital technologies" (p. 1).

Cyber bullying is defined as, "Willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text" (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006, p. 152). More specifically, "Aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who can not easily defend him or herself" (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, & Tippett, 2006, p. 6).

The definition of traditional bullying can be defined as repeated acts of, "Intimidation, aggression, or coercion against a victim who is weaker in terms of physical size or social/psychological power" (Smith, Ananiadou, & Cowie, 2003, p. 591).

In the 2007 article, "Educator's Guide to Cyber Bullying and Cyber Threats," Willard described and defined the eight different forms of cyber bullying and terms specific to cyber bullying as:

1. Flaming: Online fights using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language
2. Harassment: Repeatedly sending nasty, mean, and insulting messages.
3. Denigration: “Dissing” someone online. Sending or posting gossip or rumors about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships.
4. Impersonation: Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material to get that person in trouble or danger or to damage that person’s reputation or friendships.
5. Outing: Sharing someone’s secrets or embarrassing information or images online.
6. Trickery: Talking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, then sharing it online.
7. Exclusion. Intentionally and cruelly excluding someone from an online group.
8. Cyberstalking. Repeated, intense harassment and denigration that includes threats or creates significant fear.
9. Frenemy. A person who pretends to be a friend but is actually an enemy; a rival with which one maintains friendly relations. (Willard, 2007, pp. 1-2)

Social networking websites are defined as,

Sites 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. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (Boyd, 2006, p.12).

### **Limitations**

This study was limited to 20 purposely selected students in one Catholic high school in New Jersey. Students who had any level of experience with cyber bullying, in all grade levels, were invited to complete a preliminary survey (Appendix A). From those surveys, 10 females and 10 males were randomly selected. This study would need to be repeated in other schools, public and private, with different demographics in order to be generalized.

### **Theoretical Framework and Design**

This research study followed a qualitative design because the problem needed to be viewed through a lens that allowed the perceptions of the participants to be considered.

Symbolic interactionism was the theoretical framework, and thereby lens, that guided this study. According to Herbert Blumer (1969), the methodological position of symbolic interactionism is the process of interaction in which human beings form their own personal meanings. Symbolic interactionism “sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact” (Blumer, 1969, p. 5).

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) further describe the theory of symbolic interactionism as one that emphasizes the fact that it is only through social relationships that human beings construct the meaning from their experiences. A phenomenological approach for this study was chosen as perceptions of the extent of the cyber bullying issue is being examined from the perspective of male and female adolescents. Bogden and Biklen (2003) suggest that: “Symbols and personalities emerge from social interaction. Interaction from social relationships give meaning of experiences. Meaning of experiences are constructed through interactions in relationships” (Bogden & Biklen, 2003, p.52).

### **Change Theory**

Once the data are collected and analyzed, a major change will need to occur within this organization in order to prevent cyber bullying and ensure that all staff members are committed to implementing a school-side intervention that meets the needs of all students. It is not enough for one office, the dean’s office in this example, to combat instances of cyber bullying as they occur in a reactive manner, essentially after the damage has already been done to a child. All of the staff members should be concerned with and provided with the resources necessary to prevent all forms of bullying.

In order to create sustainable change that will live on in the school long after this research is completed, I will apply John Kotter's (1996) Eight Step Change Theory. Kotter's change theory guides this current research study and is most appropriate to the organization being studied. Private schools are really mini-businesses as they operate solely on revenue collected from tuition. The students and parents are the clients, while the school is providing an education that is specific to the type of organization it is (i.e., Catholic, Boarding School, Hebrew). This model is one that fits into both schools and major corporations. This change model will create culture change which is the most difficult to change because culture is conservative and works to preserve the status quo; structural change requires first cultural change (Evans, 1996). Appropriately utilizing a change model such as Kotter's will ensure that second-order change occurs.

Kotter's (1996) first stage is to establish a sense of urgency around the need for the change. This can only be accomplished by creating an open and honest conversation amongst all of the key stakeholders within the organization. The leadership team needs to use emotions and facts to show the employees why the change is truly urgent and that the future of the organization is reaching some sort of threat. It is also vital that the leadership team believe in the change that they are proposing.

The second stage in Kotter's (1996) change process is to create the guiding coalition consisting of all levels of employees. It is vital the team can lead change and consists of members who are in positions of power, either formal or informal, have expertise in the matter, have credibility among the staff, and have enough leadership skills to drive the change process.

Kotter's (1996) third step involves the committee developing a vision and strategy for the organization. A vision is important in clarifying the direction of the change, motivating people to take actions in the right directions, and helping to coordinate the actions of different people within the organization. The vision should be clear and concise, allowing for all stakeholders to understand where the future of the organization is headed. The vision and strategy should create a strong foundation upon which to base the change.

The fourth step, communicating the vision to the entire school community, is vital to the success of the transformation. The vision should be displayed throughout the organization as well as on the website. All members of the organization should be encouraged to talk about the vision and the feedback must be welcomed by all.

Kotter's (1996) fifth step, empowering employees for broad-based action, is facilitated by empowering the internal stakeholders to make the vision a reality by encouraging risk-taking. This also involves removing any obstacles to change.

The sixth step, generating short-term wins, involves recognizing and rewarding members of the organization who have participated in an improvement. Successes should be publicized and celebrated.

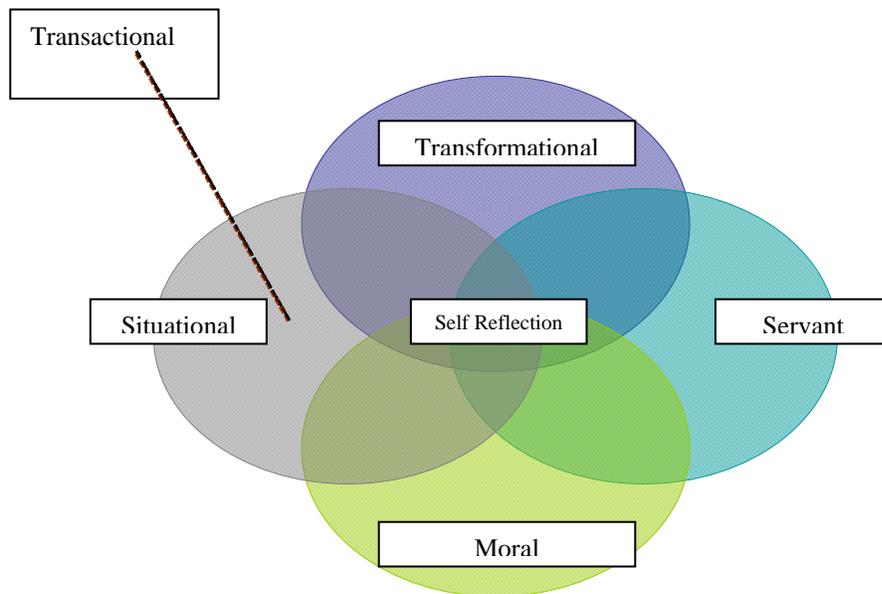
Kotter's (1996) seventh stage in the change process is consolidating gains and producing more change. Committee members who were positive examples of change agents will be promoted in some capacity and praised. Prospective employees will also be assessed according to their commitment to the new vision.

The final stage in Kotter's (1996) change process is anchoring new approaches in the culture. The goal of this step is to engrain the elements of this change within the norms

and the values of the school community. Year after year the leaders will reinforce the vision by modeling the behaviors that they want to see from the rest of their staff.

### **Espoused Leadership Beliefs**

In addition to applying a change theory such as Kotter's (1996), it is imperative that leaders have a clear compass from which to guide themselves on the journey of the change. As I begin this process, I identify myself as having traits of a transformational leader, a servant leader, a moral leader, and a situational leader. Self-reflection is at the core of my leadership toolbox as it is a compass of sorts, which guides me in selecting the most appropriate leadership style, as well as for my professional and personal growth (see Figure 1). The key to such a major organizational change is strong leadership and a platform from which to guide the leadership of the school.



*Figure 1. Espoused Leadership Beliefs*

As a leader, I am guided by my core values everyday. I work to instill the value of integrity into my students by modeling. I am honest and ethical in the way I treat the people my community. My role is such that, as an administrator in a Catholic school, I must uphold the messages that we preach to our students. I am a moral leader in that all of my actions and words are guided by my faith.

I have discovered that in order for me to be an effective leader I must be both transformational and transactional. The key is to know when to practice each theory based on the situation with which I am presented. During this first year as an assistant principal, I have been predominately practicing situational leadership. I know that over time my ability to gauge which method of leadership that is appropriate based on the situation will improve. If I am constantly reflecting on how I handle each situation, as well as the ultimate outcome, then I will more likely grow both professionally and personally.

Transformational leadership is about implementing change, staying flexible and adaptable, and continually improving those around them. Transformational leadership starts with the development of a vision, a view of the future that will excite and convert potential followers (Wren, 1995). As I begin this journey of leadership I become more and more aware that transactional leadership is most appropriate in the case of an urgent situation and I rarely utilize this “management style” of leadership. I rely on my self-reflective skills to decide if I am going to be transactional based on the situation at hand.

I realized that transformational leadership is such that I must continue to motivate and rally all of the stakeholders to believe in the vision of the school. My school community values symbolic and religious ceremonies above all else, and through these ceremonies my own mission and vision is reemphasized. Each time, I am reminded of my

role to improve student learning, teacher instruction, and to ensure students are exposed to the Catholic faith.

I know that great leaders are learners first. I have allowed my thinking to change on leadership because first and foremost, I am a learner. This is so important, because as leaders, we can not just preach change to our staff and not change ourselves; instead we must practice what we preach.

The importance of understanding an organization's culture is a concept that must not be overlooked. Since leaders must be agents of change, they must first understand what the culture is in order to change it. It is imperative to understand the set of shared assumptions within the organization that has come to be taken for granted and how it determines much of the group's behaviors.

My strength lies in my willingness to adapt to any situation that may arise. I have seen amazing leaders that encompass all leadership styles in one. That is to say, as a leader one must be able to change her leadership style as the situation itself changes. Since I am a new administrator, I have no preconceived notions or old habits regarding my leadership style. Therefore, my leadership style will often depend upon the situation.

I must create attunement among my staff and inspire them emotionally as well as intellectually. An integral piece of being a leader in a Catholic school is that the leadership can create a correlation with the staff between their passion for their faith and their jobs as educators. As a leader, I must provide my staff with the resources that they need in order to be successful in this endeavor, which explains my servant leadership style.

Reflective leadership is the key to creating a successful school environment. Self-awareness refers to a leader's ability to know herself, her strengths, and her limitations. It

implies that a leader is interested in, and committed to, examining her own reactions, thoughts, and feelings about the role of the leader.

### **Overview of the Chapters**

The next chapter provides a review of the current literature on bullying and cyber bullying as well as an analysis of the research. Chapter III provides an overview of the methodology used to collect and analyze the data for this research study. Chapter IV reveals the findings based on the data collected as well as the implications regarding the theoretical framework that was used. Finally, Chapter V concludes the research by offering recommendations for further research, policy, and practice, leadership and change process findings.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

In this chapter, traditional and cyber bullying will be analyzed as well as the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs that currently exist in various schools. An in-depth description of the forms of cyber bullying is provided along with statistics on the frequency of cyber bullying incidents and cyber bullying related suicides among adolescents. An analysis as to the unique characteristics of cyber bullying is provided along with common reasons that students today are bullied.

#### Historical Perspective

In an ever-growing litigious society, more and more schools are dealing with the repercussions of ineffective and outdated anti-bullying policies (Cooper & Snell, 2003). Over a seven-year period, researchers in Canada analyzed the bullying policies of 210 Canadian high school boards. Upon analysis of the prevention policies and programs, researchers found that there is an overwhelming need for these policies to be updated to reflect the current bullying issues that students experience. They also noted the lack of a self-evaluative component to the policies, which is vital to keeping the bullying prevention program effective as well as current (Day, Golench, MacDougall, & Beals-Gonzalez, 2002).

Formal traditional bullying preventative research began with the publication of Swedish researcher's Dan Olweus in his 1978 publication, *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys*. Since the days of Olweus, there have been many research

studies investigating the issues surrounding traditional bullying over the past 32 years. Since cyber bullying is a new phenomenon, research on the topic is limited (Gillis 2006; Li, 2006).

Cyber bullying is a problem in schools all over the world (Li, 2007). As more and more children gain access to technology, so does the opportunity for that technology to become abused. In her study on cross cultural cyber bullying issues, Li (2007) examined a sample of Canadian and Chinese adolescents. Cultural differences and experiences in relation to cyber bullying were explored and findings showed significant similarities and patterns among the two groups of children and their experiences of cyber bullying. These findings suggested that cyber bullying is a global issue as well, and that adult intervention was inconsistent in preventing and intervening in cyber bullying situations.

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), 17% of 6 to 11-year-olds and 36% of 12 to 17-year-olds reported that someone said threatening or embarrassing things about them through e-mail, instant messages, web sites, chat rooms, or text messages (USDHHS, 2010).

The drastic transition from schoolyard bully to online bully has been a rapid one. In 1999, Borg conducted a study which revealed that the two most common places for traditional bullying to occur, the classroom and the playground, are the areas where there is usually constant supervision from teachers. With increased availability of electronic devices such as mobile phones and the Internet over the last 11 years, technology has taken the lead on the medium for bullying (USDHHS, 2010). While bullying used to end with the school day, the Internet has now subjected victims to 24 hour abuse, seven days per week.

## **Forms of Cyber Bullying**

As stated in Chapter I, the University of London generated a 2006 report for the Anti-Bullying Alliance identifying seven different subcategories of cyber bullying. The following is a detailed description of each style of bullying.

**Text message bullying.** In 2002, the NCH (Action for Children), an international children's charity organization and Tesco Mobile, an international mobile phone provider, commissioned the first mobile phone bullying survey in 2002 and then again in 2005. With 97 percent of 12 through 16-year-old children owning mobile phones, most with Internet access, children can be connected to the Internet 24 hours per day. The 2005 follow-up study defined mobile bullying as "one or more unwelcome text messages that the recipient finds threatening, or causes discomfort in some way" (NCH, 2005, p. 2) . Often-times bullies can remain anonymous to their victims since they can block their phone numbers when sending these harassing messages.

**Picture/video clip bullying (via mobile phone camera or postings on social networking websites).** Photographs depicting victims in a negative way via text message is another means that bullies use to harass others. A survey of 770 male and female adolescents found that one in five had experienced this form of bullying. One in 10 of the students surveyed revealed that they had someone take a picture of them with their mobile phone causing them to feel threatened (NCH, 2005). As stated earlier, members of most social networking websites have the ability to post videos and pictures directly on their personal pages, which based on their number of "friends" and their privacy settings, can allow up to hundreds or even thousands of other people to view.

**Phone call bullying via mobile phone.** As previously stated, 97 percent of 12 through 16-year-old children own mobile phones (NCH, 2005). Since in most instances these phones are in the sole possession of the child, victims of bullying can be literally contacted anytime of the day or the night by their aggressors. “Sexting,” is a term used to describe sending “nude, sexually suggestive, or explicit pictures on a cell phone or online” (Stephey, 2009, p. 4). According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, a 2009 study found that 20 percent of teenage females have taken nude or seminude pictures of themselves, with 71 percent of those females sending the pictures to another person (LeBlanc, 2010). Female students were more apt to send these types of photographs, with 61 percent of them reporting that they were pressured to do so by someone else. One in five teenagers who receive these messages then forward them to someone else (AP-MTV, 2009). The phenomenon of sexting gives bullies yet another piece of fodder to harass their victims.

**Email bullying, chatroom bullying, bullying through instant messaging.** In a 2007 cyber bullying study conducted by Kowolaski and Limber, among the 3,767 male and female adolescents that were surveyed, electronic bullying via instant messages, chat rooms, and emails were found to be the most prevalent form of cyber bullying that those students experienced. Almost half of the victims revealed that their bully’s identity remained anonymous.

**Bullying via social networking websites.** A 2011 study conducted by Sengupta and Chaudiuru found that teenagers who belong to social networking websites such as Facebook are 90 percent more likely to be bullied than those who do not belong to such a website. Females were more likely to be victims of bullies than were males, with those

who revealed more personal information such as pictures and revealing their Instant Messenger ID receiving the most harassment.

### **Features of Social Networking Websites**

Social networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace have become immersed into popular culture, with millions of people worldwide “connecting” with others online through these websites (Li, 2006). Founded in February 2004, the Facebook website now has over 500 million members spending over 700 billion minutes per month on the website (“Facebook press room,” 2011). The website is so immersed into popular culture that the 2010 movie based on the website’s creator, Mark Zuckerberg, was nominated for eight Oscar Award nominations (Shaer, 2011).

As described on the Facebook corporate website, one of the core features allows members to have access to create a homepage that is considered their profile. In creating their profile, members are prompted to enter such information as age, hometown, name of school or workplace, and contact information. Members are also prompted to upload pictures and videos, groups they associate themselves with, personal messages, and status updates. One of the website’s most recent features includes a check-in application that allows members to instantaneously post where they are and with whom they are, all from their cell phones or computers. There is also an instant chat feature that allows members to send messages to each other in real-time (“Facebook press room,” 2011).

A report conducted by the University of London for the Anti-Bullying Alliance (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho,& Tippett, 2006) identified the following seven different subcategories, which will be expanded upon in Chapter II, as a method used to cyber bully:

- text message bullying,
- picture/ video Clip bullying (via mobile phone cameras),
- phone call bullying (via mobile phones),
- email bullying,
- chatroom bullying,
- bullying through instant messaging, and
- bullying via websites.

Facebook members have access to all of these functions, with the only exception of being able to make an actual phone call from the website.

As of January 17, 2011, Facebook reported that there were 585,184,940 members registered on their website. Of these members, 13,007,760 were identified as being between the ages of 14 through 17. With more than 30 billion pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc.) shared each month and the average user having 130 “friends” who are granted full access to their pages ("Facebook press room," 2011), this all access pass allows people to share and send information to a large number of people at a rapid pace. When the information being sent by a bully is a vicious rumor or an unflattering photograph, the victim has virtually no control over the content and has no way of stopping it. In this digital age, there is no such thing as truly deleting content off of the Internet, as the data are permanent.

### **Cyber Bullying on Social Networking Websites**

Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace offer young people an opportunity to constantly be connected to their friends as well as to communicate with different people all over the world. Websites such as these give people who may not

necessarily have strong connections with their peers a chance to build virtual friendships with others who share their interests. While these are all considered advantages for young people, there are multiple dangers young people face belonging to social networking websites.

In addition to attacks from peers, young people also face the possibility of being solicited by adults. In 2000, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006) began conducting a long-term study in an effort to track online victimization among children. Findings revealed that the most vulnerable population was teenagers who were the most likely population to encounter sexual solicitations, harassment, and pornography. The researchers ultimately suggest that school and family counselors be trained with the most up-to-date skills to help teenagers deal with the psychological effects of this type of harassment.

Rumors and slanderous words posted on social networking websites have the ability to reach hundreds of people instantaneously. While the traditional form of bullying may take the shape of verbal rumors and hearsay, cyber bullying can take the form of pictures and text that are permanently online and can be viewed first-hand by many people. In addition, since Internet access is a standard feature on cell phones, young people today can be connected to online communities 24 hours a day. Facebook's website states that, "There are more than 200 million active users currently accessing Facebook through their mobile devices and that people that use Facebook on their mobile devices are twice as active on Facebook than non-mobile users" ("Facebook press room," 2011, para. 3). This means that there is essentially no escape from bullies who utilize status updates, message postings, and images all in an effort to hurt someone else.

## **Gender and Cyber Bullying**

Many researchers on the topic of traditional bullying have found that the student's gender plays a crucial role in the kind of abuse that a victim will experience by a bully. While males will typically experience physical abuse from a male bully, females will usually encounter social isolation from a female bully (Casey-Cannon & Hayward, 2001). Many research studies claim that the long-term effects of being constantly bullied throughout a child's school years are more grueling on girls than on boys (Garbarino, 2006; Li, 2006; Mebane, 2010).

In a 2006 study, Li found that approximately one in four teenagers have been cyber bullied and as a result have experienced negative consequences such as feelings of sadness and anger. These more recent results are not surprising as researchers in the past such as Gilligan (1982) have found that girls place more of an importance on social relationships and acceptance from their peers compared to boys. Girls, especially in their teenage years, invest a large portion of their time and energy into forming relationships with their peers. Positive or negative feedback and levels of social acceptance usually determine how a teenage girl will measure her own self-worth (Gilligan).

In a 2006 study, Smith et al. found that female adolescents were more likely to be cyber bullied by text messages and phone calls than were male adolescents. The authors recommend that the gender disparities among the victims of cyber bullying be examined in future studies. Multiple studies on the topic of traditional bullying over the past 30 years have revealed that males tend to bully their victims through physical intimidation while females bully their victims through social isolation (Li, 2006; Mebane, 2010; Smith

et al., 2006). One of the goals of this study is to answer the question as to how this phenomenon translates to male and female cyber bullies.

Over the past 32 years that traditional bullying has been researched and data collected, insight has been gained by educators and researchers. Many researchers, such as those led by Dan Olweus have created effective traditional bullying prevention programs. In a 1991 study, Olweus reiterated that gender plays an imperative role in the type of bullying that a victim will experience.

There is a gap in the literature as to whether the gender patterns that are relevant in traditional bullying are the same in cyber bullying; the results that have been conducted are inconsistent at best (Beran & Li, 2005; Borg, 1999; Willard, 2007). Males were more likely to be cyber bullies over females in a 2005 study by Li on gender differences regarding cyber bullying, however a 2004 research study by Thorp found that females tend to use electronic communications such as chatrooms and email to bully their peers.

In 2004, researchers Salmivalli and Kaukiainen discovered that male students often participate in traditional bullying as assistants and “reinforcers,” whereas female students act as outsiders and defenders. Even if males are not the instigators or lead in the bullying, they may follow a lead bully or encourage the bully’s behavior by watching or laughing at the incident. While females, possibly due to their tendency to nurture, most likely will take the role of the supporter of the victim or the defender.

Recommendations from the 2010 study by Akbulut, Sahin, and Eristi suggested that more qualitative studies be conducted to gage the prevalence of cyber bullying among male and female students. Furthermore, they suggest that the possible damage that male

and female victims go through psychologically should be examined to understand the extent of the cyber bullying phenomena.

Researchers in a 2008 study examined the effectiveness of bullying intervention programs research from 1980 through 2004 (Merrell et al., 2008). The participants consisted of 15,386 K through 12 students from both European nations and the United States. The researchers' analysis surmised that the majority of intervention studies which they analyzed conducted over the 24 year period produced no meaningful change for the children involved in the intervention programs. While the authors did suggest that overall, the students who were exposed to the programs were more likely to change their attitudes toward bullying, their overall tendency to bully after the programs was not affected.

In a 2007 study conducted by Vreeman and Carroll, 26 different school anti-bullying intervention programs were analyzed for effectiveness. The study distinguished between specific styles of programs such as classroom curriculum programs, whole school programs, and training procedures for bullies and victims. While school wide programs were discovered to be the most effective style of intervention program, results of long-term effectiveness were inconclusive. One such study even concluded that the rates of bullying and victimization actually rose among both males and females.

As the studies mentioned above suggest, effectiveness of bullying prevention programs often yield mixed results. In addition, many of the studies mentioned above relied on one school wide reform model to fit the needs of all students. As demonstrated in the information presented earlier in this research study regarding gender and bullying, male and female students have different experiences with bullying based on their gender.

Some successful strategies noted in a 2007 study suggest that there are ways to incorporate successful cyber bullying methods as infused with traditional bullying awareness. Adults simply telling students not to cyber bully were considered ineffective. Effective methods included strategies such as teaching students methods to cope with cyber bullying if and when it occurs. For example, if a student is being harassed via email then that student could block the bully from their email account by adjusting their email account settings (Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007).

### **Instances of Cyber Bullying**

In a 2006 study conducted by the Anti-Bullying Alliance for the University of London, researchers found that 22% of the students surveyed had reported to be victims of cyber bullying at least once. Six percent reported being cyber bullied frequently with phone text messages, and email was the most common medium for bullies to utilize. Researchers noted that the instances of cyber bullying were more likely to occur outside of school rather than inside of school (Smith et al., 2003). Since teachers and administrators do not physically witness this type of bullying, it is imperative that more research be conducted in an effort to gauge the extent to which adolescents are cyber bullied.

According to the Cyber Bullying Research Center, an organization dedicated to researching cyber bullying among adolescents in America, cyber bullying is on the rise as more adolescents than ever have access to computers and cell phones. The organization conducted a study in 2010, which surveyed 4,441 adolescents from 37 different schools and found that 20% of the students surveyed indicated that they had experienced cyber bullying at some point in their lives. Among students who had been cyber bullied in the

last 30 days, 13.7% cited that online communities, such as Facebook, was the most common medium for bullying to take place (Cyberbullying Research Center, 2010).

All forms of bullying are serious issues in schools all over the world. Students who are bullied are denied the right to feel safe in their learning environment. The effects of bullying can last a lifetime for a victim. Some particularly vulnerable children even commit suicide as a result of constant bullying (Li, 2008).

### **Bullycide**

Suicides committed by children who have been repeatedly bullied have become so rampant in recent years that the term “bullycide” has been coined to describe the “act or an instance of killing oneself intentionally as a result of bullying” (“Bullycide,” 2010).

Statistics from a 2007 Center for Disease control and Prevention revealed the following data: “Of every 100,000 people in each age group listed the following died by suicide Children ages 10 to 14 — 0.9 per 100,000; Adolescents ages 15 to 19 — 6.9 per 100,000 ; Young adults ages 20 to 24 — 12.7 per 100,000” (Center for Disease Control, 2007, p. 12).

Since the 1950s, suicide rates among adolescents has quadrupled and is the third leading cause of death for children between the ages of 10 and 19 in the United States. Children who are victims of constant bullying are at a greater risk for committing suicide. Cases of bullycide are on the rise among young people who are bullied for their sexual orientation (Meichenbaum, 2010).

The first officially recorded suicide by a child due to being bullied was that of Steven Shepherd in Newburgh, Lancashire in 1967 (Marr & Field, 2001). Since that time thousands of documented cases of bullycide among young people have occurred. In

2010, 17 year old Alexis Sky Pilkington killed herself after being cyber bullied on a social networking website. In 2010, Tyler Celmenti, an 18 year old Rutgers University student committed suicide by jumping off of the George Washington Bridge after discovering that his college roommate had secretly video taped him having sexual relations with another man and then posted it on the social networking website Twitter (Bullycide Cases, 2010).

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, New Jersey is one of the 32 states that have adopted a state law on bullying prevention in recent years. The most current anti-bullying law for New Jersey states, “Harassment and bullying will not be tolerated on school property, at school-sponsored events, or on school buses” (USDHHS, 2010). All public schools in New Jersey are required to have anti-bullying and harassment policies which define bullying, consequences, and appropriate behavior standards. Since cyber bullying is more likely to occur outside of school, this law does not protect those victims. In addition, private schools in New Jersey are not obligated to follow any such state law on bullying.

### **Anonymity**

Anonymity can lead to life or death situations for some particularly vulnerable children. Researchers on the issue of cyber bullying agree that the most hazardous component of the Internet is anonymity (Bamford, 2004; Li, 2005; Kowolaski & Limber, 2007; Shariff & Gouin, 2006). Since bullies can hide their identity online, they often act in a way that they would not normally act in if they were face-to-face with their victim.

As the issue of cyber bullying receives more and more media attention, there is more and more pressure on school leaders to make meaningful changes in the current

school system. As previously stated, there is a gap in the current literature in relation to the phenomenon of cyber bullying. There is, however, an abundance of information on traditional bullying. One can make the argument that the research conducted on traditional bullying can be applied to cyber bullying, if it were not for the anonymous nature of cyber bullying.

While research on the topic of cyber bullying is limited, most of the current literature reveals that the component of anonymity contributes to the rise in cyber bullying incidents (Bamford, 2004; Li, 2005; Kowolaski & Limber, 2007; Shariff & Gouin, 2006). Online users of social networking websites can assume any identity that they wish. They can create profiles online with fictitious names and post any items they want online for other users to view.

In a study conducted by Li (2007) of 461 adolescent aged Chinese and Canadian students, one in three students participating in the study identified themselves as cyber bully victims, while one in five identified themselves as having cyber harassed others. Of these students, more than 40 percent of the victims reported being cyber bullied frequently. Li noted that the most distinct characteristic that separates this type of bullying from traditional bullying is the factor of anonymity. In her study, half of the victims did not know the identity of who was cyber bullying them. Thus, these types of bullies never have to deal with the consequences of their actions.

A 2002 study revealed that the anonymity factor in online communication is the leading cause for the deception that typically occurs by children (Berson, Berson, & Ferron). More and more adults have started victimizing children online in a variety of ways. When Lori Drew, a 49-year-old woman created a fictitious MySpace account

pretending to be a 16-year-old boy named Josh Evans, the result turned deadly for an unsuspecting 13-year-old girl. Megan Meier committed suicide after “Josh Evans” ended their online relationship and told her the world would be better off if she were dead (“Lori Drew MySpace,” 2008).

### **Effectiveness of Bullying Prevention Programs**

Although most states require public schools to implement a formal intervention program within their school by law, there have been few studies of the actual effectiveness of these anti-bullying programs, especially in regards to cyber bullying. There is no concrete evidence in the current literature as to the short and long-term effects of these types of programs. In a 2004 study, the effects of peer intervention programs for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were examined. While there was a reduction in the instances of female bullying after the program, the instances of male bullying actually increased (Salmivalli & Kaukiainen, 2004).

Teglasi and Rothman (2001) examined the results of a peer group intervention program. The results revealed that after the program was implemented, students who were labeled non-aggressive were less likely to be involved in future bullying situations. There was an increase in bullying incidents involving students who were labeled aggressive. As these findings demonstrate, there is a lack of clear patterns in determining the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs in schools. One possible explanation could be that many school leaders are looking for simple school-wide programs that are easy to implement without truly understanding what the students really need. There is an urgent need for more research in the field that involves investigating the students’ perceptions and experience with cyber bullying.

In a 2010 study by Chambless, gender and ethnicity were examined in relationship to self-reporting of the severity of past bullying experiences. Of the 211 men and women who participated, the females in the study reported that they perceived their victimization as an adolescent who was bullied more severely than the men perceived theirs. This research aims to discover if the gender differences regarding traditional bullying remain the same for cyber bullying. Based on these findings, more appropriate cyber bullying intervention programs can be designed.

Researchers suggest that while there is a need for more research on the consequences of being cyber bullied, the studies that have been conducted reveal that being bullied online has a more negative effect than being bullied face-to-face (Reid, Monsen, & Rivers, 2004).

### **Empathy**

The fact that cyber bullies shield themselves from seeing the hurt and anguish that they can cause their victims may decrease the chance that the bullies would feel empathy for their victims. According to Herring (2001), anonymity plays an imperative role in the ruthlessness of some bullies. Herring states that this anonymity “not only fosters playful inhibition but reduces social accountability, making it easier for users to engage in hostile, aggressive acts” (Herring, 2001 pp. 23-24).

### **Reasons Students Get Bullied**

It is imperative that the types of bullying be considered when developing intervention programs, as students have different levels of negativity in their experiences with cyber bullying, physical bullying, and verbal bullying (Givens, Swearer, & Turner 2008). Below are the most typical reasons students today are bullied.

**Sexuality.** The Human Rights Watch, one of the world's top nonprofit organizations for protecting human rights, estimated that in 2001 more than 2 million children faced harassment due to their sexual orientation (Bochenek & Brown, 2001).

In a 2008 (Givens, Swearer, & Turner) researchers further investigated if male students who were bullied by being called "gay" were affected in a more negative way psychologically than males who were being bullied physically or verbally. The results showed that the male students in the study who were bullied by being called "gay" experienced higher rates of depression and anxiety. Researchers determined that because we live in a society that has such strict gender norms, males especially are targeted for appearing to be less masculine (Givens, Swearer, & Turner, 2008).

**Body image.** As children are now classified as the quickest growing number of obese individuals, so too, do the health and social issues that these children face (Flegal & Troiano, 2000). A 2007 review of literature conducted by Puhl and Latner examined weight-based discrimination among children and adolescents. The literature review revealed that being bullied for being overweight had long-term effects on children and adolescents even after weight loss was achieved. The authors concluded that the affects of this form of discrimination on a child is just as harmful as racial and physical discriminations.

**Race.** In various studies, minority children have been found to be at an increased risk for being bullied (Peskin, Tortolero, & Markham, 2006; Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007). In a 2002 study, Rigby found that students calling others students derogatory names to be the most common form of racial bullying. Black students were

found to be the minority with the highest rates of bullying, victimized by bullying, and bully-victim classification (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003).

The research and literature mentioned in this chapter provide the foundation that informed this present research study. The nature of cyber bullying is such that it is a growing epidemic, with its' anonymous nature and ability to reach countless people, the consequences can be fatal to its' victims. The next chapter provides an overview of the methods that were used to examine the perception, prevalence, and reporting behaviors of male and female adolescents on the topic of cyber bullying.

## **Chapter III**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The following chapter provides an explanation of the rationale behind this phenomenological research design, information on qualitative research and its' relationship to this study, the participants and data collection methods. A discussion on validity, bias, insights, and sampling methods is included as well.

#### **Purpose and Methodology**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to discover the lived experiences of male and female high schools students regarding cyber bullying on social networking websites. As discussed in Chapter II, previous research has shown that male and female students have very different experiences with traditional bullying; the current phenomenon of cyber bullying has yet to be widely researched. In addition, this research sought to better understand what, if any, the gender differences were in how students perceive adult prevention of cyber bullying as well as how both genders behave in informing adults of instances of cyber bullying. The goal of this research is to ultimately provide higher education institutions and high schools a better understanding of how to integrate cyber bullying intervention and prevention techniques into current or new bullying prevention programs.

## **Research Questions**

This research aims to investigate the following research questions:

1. How do female students describe their experiences on the issue of cyber bullying on social networking websites as well as their perception of the prevalence of it?
2. How do male students describe their experiences on the issue of cyber bullying on social networking websites as well as their perception of the prevalence of it?
3. What, if any, are the gender differences in student perceptions regarding adults' prevention of cyber bullying on social networking websites?
4. When cyber bullying does occur on social networking websites, do male and female students act differently in terms of reporting abuse to adults?

## **Rationale and Assumptions**

This qualitative research design was examined and chosen over other methodologies such as quantitative design or mixed methods. While quantitative researchers look to test theories by examining relationships among different variables and emphasize a rigid structure, qualitative researchers look to examine the personal meanings that participants attach to real-world issues and offer a more fluid style of research (Creswell, 2007).

A phenomenological research strategy is one in which the researcher looks to examine the lived experiences of his or her participants. These studies usually involve a smaller number of participants, giving the researcher ample time to delve into the personal

experiences of each participant (Creswell, 2007). The goal being to gather rich descriptions that tell each participant's personal story as it relates to the subject matter.

While quantitative studies rely on concrete evidence such as numerical data for the reasoning behind a certain phenomenon, qualitative research is empirical in nature as it occurs in the natural setting of the participant (Toma, 2006). It is imperative that qualitative studies utilize research methods that maintain the validity and rigor of the data collected.

### **Participants and Sampling Methods**

This study was conducted at a middle-class Catholic high school in New Jersey. The participants consisted of 10 males and 10 females from a population of 1,010 students. I am an insider at the school being sampled as I hold the position of Assistant Principal.

As stated earlier in this dissertation, my role is not one of a traditional administrator, as I am mainly responsible for all of the student activities and events in the school. In order to obtain subjects for this research study, I made an announcement to the student-body asking for volunteers interested in participating in a research study about cyber bullying to complete a survey (Appendix A). Of the 100 surveys that were completed, I purposely selected 10 males and 10 females who identified themselves as active members of a social networking website, and as having some level of experience with cyber bullying. The students selected to participate were notified to hand in a permission slip (Appendix B) and that they would be given an appointment pass for an individual interview which would take place during school hours.

Creswell (2007) notes that purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select the right participants who will provide an in-depth understanding to the issue being studied. The small sample size allowed for in-depth interviews. All participants met my criteria of having encountered at least one experience with cyber bullying within the last school year, as well as by being active members of a social networking website.

### **Data Collection Methods**

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), interviewing and reviewing material culture are two primary ways of gathering qualitative data. Since this is a phenomenological study, the main source of data came from a series of short and focused interviews. All of the interviews were audio-taped with the participants' knowledge and consent. According to Creswell (2007) one should follow an interview protocol for questioning subjects and recording an interview. I created a heading for each interview for the purposes of keeping track of the date, location, place, and interviewee's name. I recited uniform instructions to each subject before the interview began, keeping all instructions consistent.

Each subject was also asked to sign a statement (Appendix C) that explained to them that although their interview was confidential, if they report to the interviewer that they are in danger of hurting themselves or someone else, then the proper authorities/adults would be notified. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic of bullying, I provided each subject with a blank hall-pass to be used at anytime after the interview for the purposes of seeking counsel from the guidance counselor or the school social worker (Appendix D). I also gave each subject a list of youth crisis phone hotlines and websites in the event that they experience any emotional distress after the interview

I began each interview with an ice-breaker in an attempt to make the subjects become more comfortable. Each interview started with “lighter” questions, such as asking them to state their definition of cyber bullying and what it was like to be a student at the school being studied. After the opening questions, I then began asking more personal questions, such as asking them to share their experiences regarding cyber bullying. I thanked each participant for taking the time to meet with me upon the completion of each interview.

### **Validity**

A phenomenological approach was chosen as the qualitative strategy for this study as this philosophy and method was used to discover the lived experiences of the male and female subjects regarding cyber bullying on social networking websites. The research design allows for a more detailed description of how male and females experience cyber bullying, but does not aim to answer why they have different experiences regarding cyber bullying. Instead, a description of their experiences is revealed and interpretations and meaning to describe this phenomenon are deduced. This research gives a voice to all children who are subjected to cyber bullying and portrays the humanistic side of the issue.

Since qualitative research is subjective in its very nature, Creswell (2007) suggests several methods to ensure validity and reliability of qualitative research studies. The triangulation of data involves utilizing different sources of data collection methods to enhance the validity of the research. I attempted to acquire triangulation by utilizing two sources of data collection: interviews and document collection.

Member checking was performed by giving each participant his or her transcribed interview so the participant could ensure that the words were properly conveyed into the

transcription. In addition, participants were provided with my interpretation of each of their interviews so that they could check for accuracy.

Rich, thick descriptions were used to explain the findings. Interviews were open-ended in nature, thereby allowing the participants to take the researcher on a journey of their own personal experiences and feelings regarding cyber bullying.

### **Data Management and Analysis**

After I transcribed all of the interviews I analyzed the data searching for themes and subthemes. Creswell (2007) explains that analyzing data involves constant reflection about the data as well as analysis. Since this is a phenomenological study, close attention was paid to significant statements that the subjects made regarding their lived experiences of being cyber bullied, cyber bullies, or bystanders. Once all recurring themes were identified, I interpreted the results to reveal the commonalities among the participants.

The narrative describes the experiences of each student in this study. The goal was to tell each participant's story in his or her own words. My role was to analyze the interviews and connect the data to current literature as well as make recommendations for future research. I was most concerned with painting an accurate picture of what children experience as a result of being cyber bullied. In order to explore the similarities and differences within the transcriptions, Rossman and Rallis (2003) suggest utilizing decision rules to direct the identification of specific categories. This study utilized holistic strategies to explain the connections among the data in the specific context of the students' personal experiences.

The methodology used provides the students with an opportunity to tell their story of cyber bullying in their own words, while remaining confidential. Data were triangulated

by allowing participants to physically view their transcriptions, as well as my analysis of their interviews, which were coded on the transcriptions. The chapter that follows reveals the findings and analysis of the data collected from the interviews as well as the implications regarding the theoretical framework utilized.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to discover what the perceptions of male and female students are of cyber bullying on social networking websites. Gender differences were examined in both the lived experiences of male and females as well as reporting behaviors of both sexes. This chapter focuses on the data and analysis of the findings, organized around the initial research questions.

#### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data collection methods involved individual interviews with subjects over the course of a five day period. Students were asked semi-structured, open-ended questions (Appendix E) in an attempt to allow for a more in-depth conversation about their experiences with cyber bullying. The semi-structured interview process allowed each follow-up question to be based on participants' responses and for the students to open-up in their own way and explain their personal experiences with cyber bullying. Such questions asked to subjects included:

1. "What are your experiences with cyber bullying on social networking websites?"
2. "Rate how large you think the cyber bullying issue is at our school for boys and then for girl and explain why."
3. "Describe how it makes you feel when someone likes your pictures on your profile."
4. "Explain what you would do and who you would tell if you were being cyber bullied online."
5. "Tell me about a time that you or someone you know was cyber bullied online."
6. "What do you think your teachers would do if they heard of someone being cyber bullied and why."

The groups of students interviewed consisted of 10 males and 10 females: all seniors. The racial makeup of the students was four African American students, one Hispanic student, and 15 Caucasian students. It is important to note that demographically the school as a whole has 800 Caucasian students, 100 Asian students, 60 African American students, and 50 Hispanic students. According to student data records, 90 percent of students enrolled in this school identify themselves as Catholic, while 10 percent identify themselves as “Other.”

Throughout the week of the scheduled interviews, I dressed casually in university t-shirts and jeans in an effort to make the subjects feel comfortable and more likely to talk freely. The students were also encouraged to bring artifacts to the interview consisting of printed-out copies of their social network website profiles if they had any traces of cyber bullying present. Although this was reiterated to the subject multiple times in the form of a written request, a notation on the appointment pass, as well as a verbal request, no subjects actually brought copies of their profiles. Five students said they had forgotten to bring them and 15 students reported that they did not have any cyber bullying examples to submit. One possible explanation as to why the participants neglected to bring examples of cyber bullying to the interview could be because of the sensitive nature and shame associated with being cyber bullied.

After each interview was analyzed and coded, the findings were compared to the information presented in the literature review. The intent of this research is to reveal what students go through in relation to cyber bullying on social networking websites as well as what their perception is regarding adult intervention. The hope is that this research will encourage the creation of cyber bullying intervention programs that concentrate on gender

differences in experiences with cyber bullying as well as to bring more awareness to the issue.

### **Addressing the Research Questions**

#### **Female overall definitions of cyber bullying and prevalence of cyber bullying.**

Research Question #1: How do female students describe their experiences on the issue of cyber bullying on social networking websites as well as their perception of the prevalence of it?

In order to best understand the differences and similarities among female and male adolescents regarding cyber bullying as well as the prevalence of it, it is first necessary to discover how each gender defines and classifies what constitutes as cyber bullying. I began each interview by asking the subjects to tell me how they define traditional bullying and cyber bullying. The majority of females gave similar answers as to the definition of traditional bullying. For example, Joan responded that traditional bullying is, “basically in school...like physical bullying or verbal.” Joan defined cyber bullying as:

Online like Facebook you tag a photo of someone and have something to say, like rude comments about people openly. You don't have to mention names but to be harsh people do mention names. I think of it on Facebook and all of those sites like MySpace. Texting too.

Katie gave a similar definition of the two types of bullying stating:

Traditional bullying is like pushing someone in the halls or calling someone names. Cyber bullying is making fun of someone on the Internet, but not in a joking manner. Cyber bullying is more serious like me and my friends will post things on each others Facebook wall and it will be a little joke thing not meant to hurt anyone but if its taken in the wrong context and someone doesn't get the joke then I would consider that cyber bullying.

Jen gave a similar definition of the types of bullying as the other two students mentioned and expanded on the most common way that girls cyber bully by stating:

People here cyber bully secretly on Facebook the most...they will nickname another girl and then go on their wall on Facebook so that everyone can see it and talk about them online without that person knowing. Sometimes the person finds out, but they just keep talking about them online.

Grace provided me with a similar definition of the types of bullying and gave additional examples of the types of cyber bullying that girls most experience saying:

People cyber bully the most on sites like Facebook. They will comment on my pictures online and say mean things like that I should get a belly button ring if the picture I have up shows me a little chubbier. I just comment back and tell them they are losers and why are they looking at my pictures in the first place?

All 10 of the females interviewed were asked to rate on a scale of 1 through 10 how small or large they think the issue of cyber bullying is on social networking websites at their school among other females in their school, with 10 being a severe issue and 1 being not an issue at all. One participant rated the issue as 6, four of the participants rated the issue as a 7, two rated the issue as an 8, and three students rated the issue as a 10. The females were then asked to rate how small or large they think that the issue of cyber bullying on social networking websites is among male students at their school. Two students rated the issue as a 2, three students rated the issue as a 3, five students gave the rating of a 4. The majority of females explained that the boys mostly fight physically and do not spend nearly as much time on social networking websites as females do.

Many of the females also indicated that girls, in their opinion, are much harsher than boys when it comes to cyber bullying, especially when it comes to spreading rumors and gossip. Given the choice, 6 of the 10 girls interviewed, answered that they would rather be friends with boys over girls.

As Grace said:

I like hanging out with boys more. They're like 'I'll punch you' and then they are over it. They are meaner in gym class though. They say things like 'just kill yourself' and it's said like a joke, but I don't always think it is joking.

The majority of females indicated that most females bully each other online in an attempt to raise their own social status in that they think that making other females look bad online will make them look better.

Emma, who rated cyber bullying among females as a 7, offered her explanation as to how girls cyber bully on social networking websites by stating:

It's mostly with pictures online like let's say a girl is drunk at a party and a picture gets taken...they can put it online. It's stupid petty stuff. What happens at school is kind of accepted like people prepare you for school bullying they say 'oh it's high school you'll get through it' but when it happens online it's just so much worse because online it's there forever people can just come find you and it will be continuous.

She explained to me that she was cyber bullied a couple of times on Facebook but never considered deleting her account because, "It's like with money if you have it you want more of it. It's [Facebook] so popular and it gives you the ability to have what everyone else has."

Emma also explained that the issue of cyber bullying among males is not nearly as serious as it is among females. She rates the problem as a 4 among males and said she only hears about incidents among males approximately once every two months. She thinks that males would rather fight physically than online with words.

Joan, who rated cyber bullying among females as an 8, thinks that most girls cyber bully online to make themselves appear tough and identifies social isolation as a common theme among female bullies.

If they had any guts they would say it in person and girls are worse with Facebook like if someone has a party they'll write [on their Facebook profile] who wasn't invited. The other people post comments about it...with girls sometimes they want to make it seem like they don't care, but they really do. Boys, they want to look tough, so they do more physical contact while girls want to make it look catty.

### **Male overall definitions of cyber bullying and prevalence of cyber bullying.**

Research Question #2: How do male students describe their experiences on the issue of cyber bullying on social networking websites as well as their perception of the prevalence of it?

The male students gave various definitions of traditional bullying and cyber bullying. There was a wider array of answers and less of a consensus regarding the definition and classification as to what exactly constitutes cyber bullying. It is important to note that all of the males interviewed only mentioned cyber bullying on social networking websites as the one type of cyber bullying for which they could give an example. While the majority of the female students offered various types of cyber bullying during their interviews such as via cell phone, computer, and online message boards, the majority of males indicated that most of the male bullying online consists of references to another male's sexual orientation. Many of the students indicated that they often see other male's call each other words like "gay," "homo," and "fairy" as a way to insult each other online as well as in-person. Four of the males conveyed to me that they know of other students who target other males online whom they suspect to be homosexual.

John stated that, "Regular bullying is like physically hurting someone and cyber bullying is a group of people saying something about someone else on Facebook and spreading rumors."

While Paul defined traditional bullying as, “Name calling, slamming lockers and books down and cyber bullying is name calling on Facebook.” Steve defined traditional and cyber bullying as, “Traditional bullying is trying to hurt somebody or to get their self-esteem low or emotionally or physically hurting someone while cyber bullying is harassment through Facebook... pretty much any kind of harassment.” Sam, who told me that he had just learned about bullying in his law class defined cyber bullying as, “Assault when the victim perceives it as a clear and present danger or a threat and the person who is cyber bullied is on the receiving end of it in that they feel psychologically or physically threatened.” The remaining males interviewed gave an eclectic array of answers as to how they defined both types of bullying. It is important to note that the female students were able to provide more thorough and accurate definitions that were closely related to the standard definitions of bullying presented in this paper than were the male students.

The male students were asked to give examples of cyber bullying that they had gone through or that they had seen someone else go through as well to rate how prevalent cyber bullying is among male students on social networking websites on a scale of 1 through 10, with 10 being the worst. Five students rated cyber bullying among males as a 2, four students rated the issue as a 4, and one student rated the issue as a 5. As with the female students, the males were asked to rate the issue of cyber bullying among females on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most severe. Three males rated the issue among females as a 9, two males rated the issue an 8, two males rated the issue as a 7, and three males rated the issue as a 5.

Steve, who rated the cyber bullying issue among males as a 2, told me that he only witnessed cyber bullying one time and it was on Facebook:

One time I saw another guy post an embarrassing photo of a guy on Facebook, but it was taken off immediately... it was meant as a joke. That person didn't mean to hurt anybody and as soon as they found it bothered the person he took it off.

David, who defined cyber bullying as, "On Facebook it's that instant message when someone contact you first and then starts picking on you or calling you names." He explained how while he thinks that the school is safe, cyber bullying happens daily on Facebook.

I personally don't get picked on, but if you look around online it's everywhere...mostly sarcasm stuff. Boys aren't blatant about it like girls are for boys it's mostly just to be funny or they think they are just being funny by posting stupid stuff. Girls are more straight forward [in cyber bullying other girls] while boys beat around it.

David went on to explain that while he has never cyber bullied another boy, he has participated in, what he calls a "football tradition" wherein football team players from other area high schools will post negative comments on his and other of his teammates' Facebook profiles before they are scheduled to play that team. He and his other teammates then identify those rival players by researching their football numbers and then targeting those players during the next football game. He stated, "I'll see so and so said this and then I will look-up his number and look for that kid out on the field and go after him during the game." David told me that he did not consider that to be physical bullying because it was really all about the football game and not anything truly personal.

Sam, who rated the issue a 4, stated that:

Cyber bullying doesn't happen that often among boys, like the term bullying always seems very one-sided. The times I've seen someone say something that might be construed as mean to a boy, they'll just shoot something right back just as bad. It's kind of more like an argument than a bullying kind of thing.

Sam went on to explain that he often hears about girls bullying each other on a constant basis on Facebook:

The girls go at it, I would rate them as a 6. The biggest aspect for girls is not saying things to their face and talking about each other behind their back to like everyone else. From what I have seen that's the biggest thing.

William, who rated cyber bullying among other males as a 5, admitted that he has been bullied as far back as he can remember and that he also has cyber bullied other male and female students. He stated that he tries not to let the bullying affect him:

I just don't listen to them... it goes in one ear and out the other. I just get frustrated because I feel like whenever I text someone or like talk to them they don't take it seriously. I feel like today, people take Facebook more seriously than everything else. I pick on other people when I am really annoyed at them but I do try to control myself.

He went on to explain that his perception is that all teenagers write negative comments on other people's Facebook pages, but he does not think that they all really mean what they write. He also conveyed that the students who are not involved in athletics get picked on the most online and in school.

John was the most vocal about cyber bullying on social networking websites as well as about the culture of the school. "This school is full of drama. It's all about Facebook and gossip on who's doin' what or who's hookin' up with who," John said. He explained that he feels that many of his classmates are, "so nosy, always needing to know who my girlfriend is or which girl I'm talking to now." He rated cyber bullying as a 5 and offered his philosophy as to why males cyber bully other males by stating:

Online is an easier way to call out another boy that you want to call out. Like you challenge them or say something to make them mad. It provokes him to say something to you in person. I think boys cyber bully for the attention because it makes you look like a tough kid and attracts more girls.

John admits that he has cyber bullied other boys on Facebook before because he thought that they were saying hurtful things about his sister online. He also revealed that he often comments on other boys' photographs on Facebook calling them, "little girls"

only if they have first instigated him in some way. When asked if any of the online arguments had carried over into school he responded, “Yea, I have told other guys to meet me in person and I’m not writing on Facebook anymore with them, but it hardly happens. They usually apologize to me in person if they started with me online.” He recalled an incident that occurred the year before and stated:

It can cause confrontations at school for me when I had posted a picture of me and another kid’s car we don’t like each other to begin with and his friend said something to me in school but it didn’t go far.

John also made it a point to convey to me that the cyber bullying issue among females is much worse than it is among males.

With girls I would rate it like a 9 or 10. I see it more with girls and pictures. They’ll say something like, ‘you look like a slut’ on their Facebook page or sometimes it will be a joke and then others will write things and this it’s okay. Things like that and it causes fights and problems.

John discussed why he thinks girls cyber bully each other so often and stated, “Girls know it gets the other girl mad and they like everyone talking about it. It’s easy to manipulate everybody against one person.”

### **Female and male student perceptions of adult prevention.**

Research Question #3: What, if any, are the gender differences in student perceptions regarding adults’ prevention of cyber bullying on social networking websites?

The majority of both male and female students conveyed to me that they do feel that most of the teachers in the building know that cyber bullying goes on, but that they do not do anything to prevent it or to address it when they become aware that another student is being bullied online. The majority of both male and female students also conveyed to me that they do not think that it is possible to stop cyber bullying for such reasons as: the anonymous nature of it, the newness of the phenomena, and because teenagers will always

talk badly about one another. It is important to note that in order to explore this research question, each student was asked to explain their opinion of how the school staff prevents and responds to incidents of cyber bullying at the school. In answering the question, the majority of students, unprompted, provided me with solutions as to what the school staff could and should do to prevent and to stop cyber bullying when it occurs.

William explained that most teachers, especially the younger teachers, understand Facebook and even have their own profiles on the website and that teachers are inconsistent in the way that they address the issue.

Some teachers get really mad [if they are notified that another student is being bullied online] and some don't really give a crap. I think that they don't really try to investigate [incidents of bullying online] to begin with. I feel like the school should be on social media more to just scour it to see what's going on and if anyone has a problem they'll know that this is the reason why.

Grace explained that she did not think that the teachers or administrators did much of anything to prevent or react to cyber bullying. She conveyed to me while she thinks that it is impossible to stop a bully from targeting a victim online and that most kids she knows bully each other because they were bullied, the way to stop them is to implement a prevention program that emphasizes empathy. She stated, "You need to show the person that bullying is wrong and telling them that they're mean and that hurting someone else is never going to get them anywhere seems to get through to them."

Grace explained that a prevention program that allows victims to speak directly to students who were identified as bullies would most likely help to solve the issue. She says that as someone who was once bullied, she thinks that people like her who were or are victims could talk to the bullies and say:

If you continue like this...you're just going to stay mean. It's like that song where the singer says, 'someday I'll be bigger, big enough so that you can't hit me'. I'd

tell them that I'm going to change the world, be better than you, and you're just gonna stay mean.

John told me that while he does think that the teachers know that cyber bullying occurs, they really do not know the extent of how bad it is among students. He suggested that when the school employees do discover that cyber bullying has occurred that they should impose stronger consequences on the bullies. "I think you could make it that if you get caught you get suspended and that would wake everyone [the bullies] up about it. Cyber bullying will always be there, because with technology it's just easier to type something and regret it and it's harder to say it in person."

David elucidated that he had never heard any of his teachers discuss cyber bullying in any way with him nor from his guidance counselor.

I know the younger teachers know that it goes on and I think that the older teachers get the concept of it, but they don't fully grasp it. I am not sure that they care about trying to stop it though.

He also offered a suggestion to stop cyber bullying that would be to have the physically stronger athletic students target the bullies who pick-on the physically weaker students so that they would know what it was like to be picked on.

Caitlyn believes that the younger teachers know how much cyber bullying occurs and that the older teachers are fearful of the topic since they do not truly understand it. She does not think that her teachers or guidance counselor would even know how to address the issue to the students. She described a preventative technique in which all of the students were exposed to a suicide awareness program so that the issue became more "real" to the school community.

Emma illustrated the notion that while most teachers know that traditional and cyber bullying occurs, they do not address it with their students in either a preventative or reactive manner.

I feel like some of them just turn a blind eye and don't really care. Not so much with my classes, but I have some friends in the lower level classes and the kids are obnoxious and kids do get picked on and the teachers just ignore it.

### **Female and male student perceptions of reporting abuse to adults.**

Research Question #4: When cyber bullying does occur on social networking websites, do male and female students act differently in terms of reporting abuse to adults?

The majority of male and female students responded to me that if they were being bullied that they would tell their guidance counselor. Five of the females reported that in addition to their guidance counselor that they would tell their mother. Interestingly, the majority of students identified the guidance department as a place that they go to talk to someone about college information and nothing more. It is important to note that while 15 of the 20 students interviewed admitted that they had been cyber bullied on a social networking website within the last year, only two students actually reported it to their guidance counselor office. Those two students, both females, told me that they did not tell their guidance counselors about the incidents, because they did not feel that anything would get done to stop the issue, even though the dean in this school is known for addressing discipline issues in a swift and fair manner.

Two of the male students reported that if they were getting bullied online while they would in-fact report the incident to their guidance counselor, if they were physically threatened then they would mostly likely have a physical altercation off school grounds

with that person. John explained, “Yea, if someone threatened me, I would probably take things into my own hands and fight that person.”

Jen discussed with me the fact that while she would report most cyber bullying incidents to her guidance counselor, her and most of her friends who have been physically threatened have gone straight to the dean’s office to report their concerns. She said, “When I have felt threatened for real I have gone to that office because they really deal with discipline and they could handle it if someone tried to do something to me illegally.”

William illustrated the conundrum that the majority of the students deal with when deciding if they should report that they were being cyber bullied. He explained, “I guess telling someone at the school is a way to get people to stop picking on you but, they [the bully] would just come after you more for tattling on them.”

Nine of the females interviewed reported that a strong social connection has helped them deal with getting bullied. Those students explained to me that when they have experienced bullying in some way that they find comfort in talking to their friends about the incident. While only three of the males interviewed identified their friendships as a coping mechanism to deal with getting bullied.

### **Emergent Subthemes Among Subjects**

Information garnered in the collection of the data revealed several subthemes identified as (a) anonymity, (b) picture “liking” and self-worth, and (c) students’ lack of understanding of self-defense mechanisms on social networking websites.

**Anonymity and rates of cyber bullying.** The subtheme of anonymity arose as the reason that the majority of females and males gave for why they perceive cyber bullying to be such a large issue on social media websites. Fifteen of the students interviewed

discussed the element of anonymity and stated that the cyber bullies they knew of would most likely never say the things that they wrote online to their victims face-to-face.

Emma explained:

There are so many websites that you can go on and post mean stuff anonymously about other people. Like Formspring, a site that you can post mean messages without anyone knowing who you are. It's so bad people write things on there that are totally wrong they would never say that to someone's face. I had that happen to a friend... they put up personal information about her that no one should have known and she thought it was one person but then it was someone else. It's stuff like that that is the worst... people putting your personal stuff online for everyone to see.

Stacie explained that cyber bullying is impossible to stop due to the component of anonymity. She stated:

It's impossible to stop cyber bullying on these kinds of sites. Facebook has so many ways that you can say something hurtful. Sites like Tumbler, Twitter, Formspring, you can write anything you want to about someone and no one would know who said it.

**Picture/status “liking” and effects on females and males.** An unexpected subtheme that arose is the phenomena of the female and male students having feelings of joy and in some cases elation when another person “likes” their photograph or status on Facebook. The “like” button is one that another person can click on which is located underneath all photographs and social statuses on another person's Facebook page. This feature is individual to the Facebook website and allows all of the person's contacts to see how many people “liked” their picture or status. At the time that this research was being conducted, I did not find any other research studies that examine the relationship between “liking” on Facebook and feelings of self-worth among adolescents.

Jen stated, “When you get a lot of “likes” about something it boosts your self-esteem, but it doesn't really last too long.” Joan explained, “It's always nice when

someone likes your photos or comments. When I was younger and just got the account I cared more like if a boy would “like” something it made me think maybe he liked me.” Grace stated that, “I like when people “like” my picture I think people gain confidence when they “like” your picture.”

Sam stated that when he posts something that he considers to be funny as his Facebook status and other people “like” his status, it makes him feel even funnier. He also said that at times it makes him feel strange and weird when people “like” his status who do not understand his inside jokes. David relayed that it is, “A great feeling when someone “likes” your picture on Facebook.” Chris stated, “I’m not gonna lie, it does make me feel good when someone “likes” what I wrote or my picture.”

**Lack of online defense skills.** While the majority of female and male students relayed to me that they spend the majority of their online hours on the social networking website Facebook, almost all of them had no understanding as to how to report online abuse or harassment to the website headquarters. Seventeen of the students interviewed revealed that when someone had posted an embarrassing photograph or video of them online, they had no idea how to get that picture or video off other than by asking the person who posted it to remove it. All 17 students were successful in their own attempts to have the embarrassing photograph or video removed by simply asking the person who posted it to remove it themselves. When asked what they would have done if that person refused to remove the content the answered varied slightly. Three of the males interviewed stated that they would physically assault another male if that person refused to remove such a picture or video from the website. Five of the females interviewed stated that they

would report the situation to the dean's office and to their parents if a person refused to take an embarrassing photograph or video down from the website.

The Facebook website has a section titled "Safety Center" which can be found by scrolling to the very bottom of the website's homepage. Within the "Safety Center" portal, there is information for educators, parents, and children on such topics as bullying, a guide to reporting abuse online, instructions on how to block harassers, and information for law enforcement authorities for cases of "extreme abuse and threats."

The majority of students interviewed also informed me that while they have had limited conversations with their guidance counselors on the topic of bullying, with the format being primarily the counselor quickly asking the students how everything was going during a course selection meeting, they report to never have received any instructions as to how to defend themselves from being a victim online. The majority of students also did know that the link to report a photograph or video to the Facebook Safety Team was located directly underneath of, in small print, every photograph or video that is posted and "tagged" with another person's name on it on that website.

### **Literature Connection**

**Traditional gender bullying patterns.** As stated in the review of literature, many researchers on the topic of traditional bullying have found that the student's gender plays a crucial role in the kind of abuse that a victim will experience by a bully. While males will typically experience physical abuse from a male bully, females will usually encounter social isolation from a female bully (Casey-Cannon & Hayward, 2001). This research proved to be in accordance with the above phenomenon and did, in fact, transfer over to cyber bullying, as the majority of female students indicated that they had been bullied

and/or cyber bullied another female mainly for the purposes of trying to improve their social status. The females interviewed conveyed that they see other females often posting rumors about other females and posting lists of names of other females who attended parties in an effort to make the females who were not invited feel badly. The males in this study also upheld the phenomena of traditional bullying patterns as the majority of males' experiences with cyber bullying among other males often led to physical threats and/or altercations. That is to say, while a male cyber bullying situation will play-out similar to a female's in that the origin of the altercation will begin with words or pictures posted online, the majority of males will take the situation to a physical level.

**Anonymity.** As stated in Chapter II, past researchers on the issue of cyber bullying agree that the most hazardous component of the Internet is anonymity (Bamford, 2004; Kowolaski & Limber, 2007; Li, 2005; Shariff & Gouin, 2006). Since bullies can hide their identity online, they often act in a way that they would not normally act in if they were face-to-face with their victim. This message was reiterated in the interviews of both the female and male students in this research. The majority of students interviewed indicated that the fact that cyber bullies can hide their identity or make-up fictitious names and profiles for other students leads to an increase in the harshness and frequency of cyber bullying. Most of the students interviewed conveyed to me that the cyber bullies they knew of would never actually say the things that they were posting about their classmates if they were face-to-face with them.

The anonymity factor also contributes to why some of the students interviewed never reported being cyber bullied to school authorities. Four of the students interviewed

stated that in the past they had no way of reporting being cyber bullied because the person harassing them online was using a fictitious screen name.

**Gender norms.** As stated in the review of the literature, the Human Rights Watch, conducted a 2001 study and found that males who were bullied by being called “gay” were affected in a more negative way psychologically than males who were being bullied physically or verbally. The 2008 study also indicated that males were most commonly bullied for being suspected or openly gay as well as for appearing less masculine than other males. Findings in this current study correlate with this as the majority of males in this study admitted that the most common form of cyber bullying among other males begins as males calling each other name such as “gay,” “homo,” and “fairy” on each other’s Facebook pages. Most of the males interviewed indicated that appearing physically tough was most important to them.

**Body image.** This literature review revealed that being bullied for being overweight had long-term effects on children and adolescents even after weight loss was achieved and the effects of this form of discrimination on a child is just as harmful as racial and physical discriminations. Five of the females in this research study indicated that they had been targeted by cyber bullies for being overweight and that this type of bullying was especially hurtful to them.

### **Identification of Biases**

While being mindful to be objective and open during each interview, every researcher has her own biases and assumptions. Revealing and acknowledging these biases is an opportunity to ensure that the research is not swayed in one direction or

another. I identified and reflected on my biases and assumptions throughout this process by keeping a private journal of my experiences and feelings regarding this research study.

Through constant self-reflection and prayer, I realized that since I was a victim of bullying as a child that I have an extreme sense of empathy for bullying victims. I noted that during the interviews when a student revealed that they were victims of cyber bullying I began to feel sadness for them and I found that my line of questioning was being affected, as I did not feel comfortable pressing the students to reveal further details than they offered of their experiences. This potentially could have affected the amount of data collected, as a different researcher without past drama of being bullied might have pressed the victims to provide more details or examples as to their experiences. The conundrum exists in that the victims could have then been traumatized by that experience of a non-overly empathetic interviewer pressing them for details on a sensitive subject.

### **Limitations**

As with any research study there were limitations in this current study. One limitation is the willingness of the subjects to give honest and thoughtful answers to the interview questions and the ability of the researcher to capture instances of cyber bullying since they occur online on members' Facebook pages, and the students' pages are only accessible if the student "friends" another person. Since cyber bullying is a new phenomenon, there are a limited number of current scholarly studies on the topic. Another limitation is the fact that I am an administrator in the building where the study is being conducted. My role in the school is not that of a traditional assistant principal in the sense that I do not deal with any discipline or curriculum matters. Before each interview, I made a verbal statement to each subject explaining that I would be interviewing them for the

sole purpose of my dissertation research, and that anything said in the interview would remain confidential. In addition, on the scheduled day of the interviews, I dressed wearing a Rowan University t-shirt and jeans. This was done in an effort to help alter the subjects' perception of me as a school leader.

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

As stated in Chapter I, symbolic interactionism was the lens that guided this current study. This theoretical framework was chosen as its very implications connect with the subject matter of how students perceive the issue of cyber bullying based on the value that they place on their social interactions. Moreover, the very nature of bullying is a social process, with individuals attaching their own meanings to the behaviors and actions of other people. This framework, falling under the qualitative phenomenological umbrella, allowed me to explore each student's subjective and individual personal experiences with cyber bullying along with the meanings that each person attached to those experiences. The life experiences that each student had all contributed to the shared meanings, as well as feelings of how they viewed themselves and others in their world. Utilizing this framework permitted me to take each student's personal experience with cyber bullying as well as the meanings that were attached to their experiences and create an understanding of how male and female students compartmentalize and view cyber bullying.

## Chapter V

### Overall Discussion and Leadership Initiatives

#### Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine the perceptions and prevalence of cyber bullying on social networking websites, as told by male and female students. Data were also sought as to the students' experiences with adult preventions as well as reporting patterns among males and females. Although the school studied has a clearly posted anti-bullying policy, there is a definite disconnect in the implementation of preventive and proactive measures by the staff, especially the guidance department.

During the process of this dissertation I reflected on the possible reasons that the guidance department members were not implementing any type of bullying prevention programs, or providing resources to the faculty members. I suspect that the reason lies in the fact that the students were not reporting bullying instances to their counselors, as the subjects revealed to me during my interviews with them. The students gave similar answers as to why they did not confide in their counselors, in that they felt that their guidance counselor was more of an academic resource for scheduling courses and planning for college than a true social counselor. I theorize that since the majority of students in this school are academically successful, the school leaders assume that all is well and no changes are necessary. A successful change process will work in changing the school culture, even when faculty is unaware that a change is needed.

Within this chapter, I will provide a change model, by utilizing Kotter's Eight Step Change Process (1996) as well as recommendations for an appropriate bullying prevention

program, which will include elements that are necessary based on the needs of both male and female students.

### **Social Justice and Ethical Considerations**

Foster (1986) described that each administrative decision restructures human life and is therefore, a true resolution of moral dilemmas. All schools, both private and public, have an ethical obligation to provide a safe and supportive academically rigorous environment. Social justice and ethical leadership are intertwined in that the leadership of any school must have a moral vision of what is required and a proactive responsibility for educational leadership (Starratt, 2005). Because of this research, the school leadership in this school now has an ethical responsibility to create positive changes and create an ethical standard that the students and faculty should follow.

### **Organization Changes and Research Questions**

The research questions in this dissertation were as follows:

1. How do female students describe their experiences on the issue of cyber bullying on social networking websites as well as their perception of the prevalence of it?
2. How do male students describe their experiences on the issue of cyber bullying on social networking websites as well as their perception of the prevalence of it?
3. What, if any, are the gender differences in student perceptions regarding adults' prevention of cyber bullying on social networking websites?
4. When cyber bullying does occur on social networking websites, do male and female students act differently in terms of reporting abuse to adults?

Based on the results from the analysis of the data collected for this dissertation, it is apparent that male and female students have seemingly different experiences in their perception of the prevalence of cyber bullying on social networking websites. While the majority of female students reported that they witness frequent cyber bullying online by other females, the majority of male students indicated that they rarely encounter cyber bullying, and when they do encounter it, it usually leads to a physical altercation. In addition, both sexes were accurate in their perceptions of the opposite sex's experiences with cyber bullying, in that the majority of females indicated that they do not perceive males to cyber bully as much as females, and the majority of males indicated that they often see females cyber bullying online.

It is interesting to note that the gender norms in traditional bullying followed over to cyber bullying in that the males' cyber bullying often led to physical altercations with other males, while the females reported experiencing a social isolation style of cyber bullying (Casey-Cannon & Hatward, 2001). Hence, male and female students have different experiences regarding cyber bullying and therefore, have different needs in a prevention program.

The majority of males and females provided similar responses in relation to research questions three and four. As the majority of both genders feel that there is little to no intervention by adults at the school and both genders typically report instances of abuse to the dean's office. This is significant, as this research revealed that the students in this study ultimately have no knowledge of how to defend themselves online from bullies, nor do they have a clear concept of which department is charged with bullying prevention.

The next section will provide the school, and school's similar to this one, with an action plan for change.

### **Implementing the Change**

As I began the plan, I closely studied The Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards as well as Kotter's Eight-Stage Change Process (1996) in an effort to make the change truly second-order in nature. In making a second order change, myself and the other leaders in the building must be committed to transforming the culture at a "deep, psychological level involving attitudes, actions, and artifacts that have developed over substantial periods of time" (Evans, 1996, p. 49).

Effective leaders know that it is human nature to resist and avoid change at all costs, and true change starts with cultural change. I know that I will be met with tremendous resistance as I plan on implementing a program that holds teachers accountable to report, intervene, and assess for signs of bullying on a daily basis.

Culture is conservative and works to preserve the status quo; structural change requires cultural change (Evans, 1996). In order for my second order change to occur, I must focus on changing the culture of the school regarding the perceptions of roles and beliefs on bullying. Edgar Schein (1992) has noted that, "Trying to restructure an organization without confronting its underlying cultural assumptions is truly futile...to change an organization's structure therefore, one must attend not only to rules, roles, and relationships but to systems of beliefs, values, and knowledge as well" (p. 382).

Kotter's (1996) first stage is to establish a sense of urgency. The principal should present all members of the staff with the results from my research in an attempt to show all members of the school that cyber bullying is a problem in this school, and the lack of

an official intervention program. The fact that there is a breakdown in the communication protocol should be discussed. For example, the students are unsure if the guidance department would even have the resources necessary if the student was to report a bullying incident. The administration needs to break the stereotype that schools that are academically successful are not necessarily places that are bully-free, by any means. The principal should also show the staff federal, state, and local statistics on traditional and cyber bullying statistics.

The second stage in Kotter's (1996) change process is to create the guiding coalition. Directly after the first staff meeting, a volunteer committee of teachers, supervisors, students, and parents should be formed to lead the search for an appropriate intervention program as well as to lead the school in implementing the program that is selected. Such an intervention program should include gender specific strategies and techniques to prevent and deal with bullying incidents. Another important component is to select an intervention program that will give the students the specific tools necessary to defend themselves online from attackers. As noted in Chapter IV, many of the students interviewed discussed the fact they do not know how to block a bully on their social networking websites or how to remove an embarrassing photograph or video. Another essential element to this program is to teach the students to be ethical and kind when communicating with their peers online. The cloak of the computer screen was one reason that the students in this study gave for the severity of cyber bullying.

The key to putting together the type of team that can lead change is finding members who are in positions of power, have expertise in the matter, have credibility

among the staff, and have enough leadership skills to drive the change process (Kotter, 1996). The principal should make this clear to the faculty before they sign-up to volunteer.

Kotter's (1996) third step involves the committee developing a vision and strategy. A vision is critical to clarifying the direction of the change, motivating people to take actions in the right direction and helping to coordinate the actions of different people. As the committee creates the vision, they should be informed of Kotter's list of six characteristics of an effective vision (p. 72). As a team, a vision and the strategy should be written, thereby creating a strong foundation with which to base the change. The vision should be written in such a way that it will be clear, concise, and direct. After the vision has been written and the whole school community has been given an opportunity to approve it, a formal bullying prevention program that aligns with the vision can then be selected.

The fourth step, communicating the vision to the entire school community, is vital to the success of the transformation. The committee will present the bullying prevention program to the staff during multiple in-services. The in-service will be designed in such a way that all staff members will understand their roles and responsibilities involving preventing and reporting instances of bullying. Teachers will be asked to devote class-time to explaining integral parts of the program to the students, such as what forms of bullying there are, and who they should go to if they are being bullied. The vision should be posted all over the school in the form of posters as well as online. All members of the school will be encouraged to talk about the vision and feedback should always be welcomed by all. Morning announcements should reiterate the vision by incorporating prayers and messages that build upon the deep-seated values of the mission.

Kotter's (1996) fifth step, empowering employees for broad-based action, will be facilitated by allowing all of the members of the school community, including students, to be empowered to make the vision a reality. Teachers and administrators will provide students with an open-line of communication by allowing students to open-up about bullying in a safe environment.

A guidance counselor should be stationed in a reserved classroom daily during lunchtime for students to come and talk about bullying. Peer support groups should be formed to help students handle the emotional toll that bullying has on a child. There should also be an online bullying reporting form placed on the school's homepage for victims to report any incidents of bullying. This form will allow victims to remain anonymous if they wish to, as during the interviews many of the students indicated that they were afraid to report incidents of cyber bullying for fear of retaliation from the bully.

The principal should also ensure that a classroom be available during lunchtime for teachers to come and talk about bullying with one of their peers from the committee. The committee member should empower the teacher by providing the teacher with tips and resources on how to be proactive in addressing all forms of bullying with students. The teachers will also have the option of going to the committee member at lunch time to discuss flaws or inconsistencies within the bullying prevention program. The dean will also be available during the lunch period for all teachers and students to report more serious incidents of bullying.

The sixth step, generating short-term wins, will involve the committee working with the dean's office and Guidance office in analyzing the data regarding the reported number of instances of bullying. Posters with graphs indicating a declining number of

instances per month should be portrayed, if appropriate. If instances of bullying are not steadily declining, then the committee will need to reevaluate the intervention program.

The committee will also give anonymous questionnaires to both teachers and students asking them to comment if they think the program is working, and how they have been affected by the program. Results of these data will be given to the teachers in an effort to reinforce the value and significance of the program.

Kotter's (1996) seventh stage in the change process is consolidating gains and producing more change. After the initial first few months that the program is in place, some staff members might be inclined to fall back into hold habits of ignoring bullying that they witness, or not reinforcing the values of the program into their lessons. The committee will periodically keep the vision fresh and current by bringing in guest speakers to remind the staff as to why the change movement began. As bullying can have such severe effects on students, that sense of urgency from stage one of the process should never be forgotten. The administration will model the importance of this issue by constantly reinforcing the behavior and adult responsibilities regarding bullying intervention. Committee members who are positive examples of change agents will be promoted in some capacity and praised. Prospective employees will also be assessed according to their commitment to the new vision.

The final stage in Kotter's (1996) change process is anchoring new approaches in the culture. The goal of this step is to engrain the elements of this change within the norms and the values of the school community. The program will constantly be reevaluated to ensure that the needs of the school are being met; if they are not, then the necessary changes will be made. If the program is still effective, then the team will show how the

implementation of the plan has improved such variables as student achievement, created a more positive atmosphere, and decreased the number of issues regarding all forms of bullying. Year after year, the leaders will reinforce the vision by modeling the behavior they want to see from the rest of their staff. Cyber netiquette will be reinforced with all members of the school community and modeled by the principal.

### **Implications for the Future**

The implications for further research on the topic of male and female perceptions of cyber bullying are endless. Future research endeavors that are specific to this research include focusing on the relationship between self-worth and picture/status “liking.” The area of cyber bullying and empathy could also be investigated in future studies. Because of the newness of the phenomena, the long term effects of being cyber bullied as compared to traditional bullying also needs to be researched. Policy recommendations include creating policies for schools based on each school’s individual needs of the students. No one policy is perfect for all schools and policy formation needs to first begin with an analysis of the needs of the students in each particular district.

My own leadership changed as I completed this research in that I realized that to be truly transformational is to first know the needs of the members of the school community. On the surface, the school being studied appeared to be functioning successfully, with 98 percent of its graduating seniors going on to attend college programs. Underneath, a breakdown existed and thereby caused students to feel helpless and ill-prepared to deal with the complexities of living in this digital age. I have learned that creating a shared vision is imperative before change can occur, and that no matter how

passionate I am about preventing cyber bullying, all members of the school community must also believe in the vision to be committed to the change.

The biggest lesson that I have learned, is that good truly is the enemy of great. When a school is successful academically, perhaps because that is what is most talked about when assessing an educational organization – test scores, college readiness, number of advanced placement courses offered – then that is what will inevitably be focused on.

Jim Collins (2001) said it best in his book *Good to Great*:

We don't have great schools, principally because we have good schools. We don't have great government, principally because we have good government. Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life. The vast majority of organizations never become great, precisely because the vast majority become quite good-and that is the main problem. (p. 46)

Transformational leadership is about implementing change, staying flexible and adaptable, and continually improving those around them. I will continue to study the process of change as well as cultivate the culture of the building, so that not only are academic successes celebrated and focused on, but social and psychological successes as well. I will continue to practice the art of self-reflection. In addition, I am going to ask the staff to anonymously evaluate me, the other administrators, and the school as a whole. In the end, school leaders are the ones who are responsible for the success and failure of any school. As such, leaders must be attuned, not only to their students academically, but morally and ethically as well.

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## Appendix A

### Preliminary Survey

Instructions: The purpose of this survey is to discover how you, as a student, feel about cyber bullying. This survey will provide our school with valuable information about one part of school atmosphere. Think about each question carefully, making sure that your answer accurately reflects how you feel about each question. If you are selected to participate in the research study that follows then you will be contacted within the next two weeks by Mrs. Schaed

For the purposes of this study, cyber bullying is defined as: being cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of hurtful acts using the Internet or other digital technologies such as a cell phone.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. Please indicate your current grade level

Ninth \_\_\_\_\_

Tenth \_\_\_\_\_

Eleventh \_\_\_\_\_

Twelfth \_\_\_\_\_

2. Please indicate your gender

\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_ Female

3. Do you have an active profile on a social networking website?

\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

4. Please respond to the following statements by checking the appropriate responses.

Opinions about your school:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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I feel that my school is welcoming to all people.

I feel safe while I am at school.

I feel that my teachers really care about me.

I feel that traditional bullying is a major issue in my school

I feel that cyber bullying is a major issue in my school

I feel that the teachers in my school try to stop bullying when they witness it happening. I often see or hear of other students getting cyber bullied at my school.

5. Your personal experiences at your school and online

	Everyday	1 or 2 times per week	1 or 2 times per month	1 or 2 times per year	Never
How often have you been bullied at school?					
How often have you been bullied online?					
How often have you been physically threatened at school?					
How often have you been physically threatened online?					
How often have you been teased in a mean way at school?					
How often have you been teased in a mean way online?					
How often have you been called hurtful names at school?					
How often has someone posted mean things about you on the internet?					
How often has someone spread false rumors about you at school?					
How often has someone spread false rumors about you online?					

6. Place an "X" in the box to show how often you have noticed bullying going on in each of the places listed during this past year.

	Everyday	1 or 2 times per week	1 or 2 times per month	1 or 2 times per year	Never
In classrooms.					
In the lunchroom or the hallway.					
During classes					
In PE class					
In the locker room					
Online on social networking websites					
In the bathrooms					
On the bus					

Thank you for your participation in this survey

**Appendix B**

**Parental Permission Slip**

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a graduate student in the Education Leadership Department at Rowan University and I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. Robert Campbell. As part of my doctoral dissertation concerning the perception and prevalence of cyber bullying among adolescents on social networking websites, I am requesting permission for your child to participate in this research. The goal of the study is to ultimately determine how rampant cyber bullying is as well as how to prevent it.

Each child will be interviewed individually by me for one hour, one time, at some point in October or early November 2011 during the school day. I will ask your child questions regarding their experiences with cyber bullying. I will inform your child that if any time during the interview they become uncomfortable they do not have to answer a question or they can end the interview entirely. I will be audio taping the interview so that I will be able to transcribe the interview for the purpose of data analysis. I will contact each student after the interview has been transcribed so that they have an opportunity to review the transcription and my analysis of their interview. Students will remain anonymous and a pseudonym will be used for each child. Each interview will solely be used for the purposes of my dissertation and audio tapes and transcriptions will be locked in a secure cabinet in my home.

Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study will have absolutely no effect on your child's standing in his/her class. At the conclusion of the study a summary of the group results will be made available to all interested parents. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 732-739-0800 or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Robert Campbell, at (856) 256-4500 ext.3817 Thank you.

Sincerely,

Dana Schaed

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement below and returning this letter to Dana Schaed by October 16.

\_\_\_ I grant permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this study.

\_\_\_ I do not grant permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent/Guardian signature)                      (Date)

## Appendix C

### Confidentiality Clause

Please be advised that this is a confidential study; however, if you reveal to the interviewer that you are in danger (or think you might be in danger) of hurting others or yourself, the interviewer is required by law and Board of Education policy to report that to a counselor, other school official, and/or your parent/guardian.

By signing this form, you are acknowledging that you understand the above policy.

Name Print \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix D**

### **Pass for Counselors and Resources**

“If you are feeling that you would like someone to speak to after our interview regarding any emotional distress that you may or may not be feeling, I am providing you with the following resources”

1. A pass for now or in the future to go see your guidance counselor
2. A pass for now or in the future to go see the school social-worker
3. The following hotlines and websites:

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org) (888) 333-2377

Covenant House Youth Crisis Hotline [covenanthouse.org](http://covenanthouse.org) (800) 999-9999

Focus Adolescent services [www.focusas.com](http://www.focusas.com) (877) 362-8727

National Center for Victims of Crime [www.ncvc.org](http://www.ncvc.org) (703) 276-2880

## Appendix D

### Interview Protocol

1. How do you define what bullying is and can you give me some examples of different types of bullying?
2. How do you define what cyber bullying is and can you give me some examples of different types of cyber bullying?
3. Can you give me some of your own personal experiences involving cyber bullying or being cyber bullied?
4. When is the last time you saw someone else cyber bullied? Explain
5. Do you think traditional bullying is an issue at this school? If yes, how big of an issue do you think it is? Can you give me one example of bullying that you witnesses?
6. Do you think cyber bullying is an issue at this school? If yes, how big of an issue do you think it is? Can you give me one example of cyber bullying that you witnessed?
7. Why you think children and adolescents are bullied at all?
8. Why do some children and adolescents bully others at all?
9. What do you think makes cyber bullying stop?
10. Tell me about a time when or if someone posted mean or hurtful images of you on social networking websites?
11. Have you ever cyber bullied someone else? If yes, why?
12. In the last few months have you been in an online fight with someone? If yes, explain.
13. Have you ever received messages online that were threatening? If yes, explain how that made you feel and what was the ultimate outcome.
14. Explain how your perception of rumors and gossip as it relates to social networking websites. Does it happen often among teenagers? Does it effect how well someone might do in school academically? Does it carry into school, for example is someone says something hurtful online, what usually happens in school the next day?
15. How often do people post hurtful or embarrassing photos of other students on social networking websites? Can you give me an example?
16. How often do other people expose secrets about others on social networking websites? Can you give me an example?
17. Are your parents “friends” with you on social networking websites? If so, do they ever comment on any of your online posts? Explain.
18. Have you ever been “defriended” or excluded from a person’s Facebook page? If yes, explain. How did it make you feel?
19. Do you think students at our school are cyber bullied often? If yes, explain.
20. Do you think boys or girls cyber bully more? Explain
21. Explain about a time when you say cyber bullying carry over into school.
22. How often do you think students cyber bully on social networking websites using the school’s laptops? Explain.

23. If you saw someone being cyber bullied, what would prompt you to tell an adult?  
Can you give me an example when and if this has happened to you?
24. Have you ever told a teacher that you or someone else you know is being cyber bullied? Why or why not?
25. How does it make you feel when someone “likes” your status update on Facebook?  
Explain.
26. How does it make you feel when someone gets more “likes” than you do on Facebook?
27. What do you think your teachers know about cyber bullying?
28. What do you think would happen if you told a teacher or other adult that you were being cyber bullied?
29. What are some things that you could do personally to stop someone from cyber bullying you?
30. If you saw someone else being cyber bullied, what do you think you could do to help that person?
31. What message would you give to cyber bullies?
32. If you saw or knew of someone who posted a message online threatening to hurt themselves, would you tell an adult? Who?
33. Tell me what it’s like to be a student at this school.

Follow up terms:

What do you mean?  
I’m not sure that I am following you.  
Would you explain that?  
What did you say then?  
What were you thinking at the time?  
Give me an example.  
Tell me about it.  
Talk me through the experience.