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## Cyberbullying: Impacting Today's Youth

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## Cyberbullying: Impacting Today's Youth

by

Hillary Noll, B.A.

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Social Work  
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

Committee Members  
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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

### **Abstract**

Cyberbullying is becoming a major concern surrounding the adolescent population because of the increased use in the internet and social networking sites. Studies show that cyberbullying can cause mental health concerns in adolescents who have been victimized, leaving them feeling lonely, depressed, and rejected. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of high school students who have been victimized by cyberbullying and to explore the relationship between cyberbully victimization and suicide. An anonymous mixed methods study was utilized and formatted with both quantitative and qualitative questions. The survey was distributed by email to students enrolled in the Bachelors of Social Work program at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University and asked respondents specific questions in regards to their personal experience being victimized by cyberbullying and the impacts it had on them. The results were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics and independent t-test and analyzed qualitatively using a content analysis approach. Results indicated that high school students who were victimized by cyberbullying experienced negative emotional impacts including feeling sad, helpless and hopeless, frustrated, and low self-esteem. The results of this study did not find a significant relationship between cyberbully victimization and suicide but did find that respondents reported feeling suicidal in the open-ended responses. Results from this study were consistent with pre-existing literature.

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## Introduction

When the thought of bullying arises, many people think of physical altercations or face-to-face harassment. Cyberbullying is a relatively new term that takes on a whole new form of bullying. Cyberbullying is a form of bullying that occurs through electronic technology including texting, email, messaging online, over social networking sites, or through any other electronic device (US Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). While cyberbullying has been going on through text messages, emails, and chat rooms for quite some time, the number of cases have begun to rise as the use of social networking sites by adolescents becomes more prevalent (Sengupta & Chaudhuri, 2001). Studies have shown that 90% of adolescents report using the Internet on a regular basis and about 70% report having at least one user profile on a social networking site (Patton et al., 2014). The use of social networking sites, such as chat rooms, Facebook, or Twitter, gives adolescents ample opportunity to be in contact with one another. It has been reported that social media and social networking sites are a common way for youth to perpetuate violent acts, including bullying and harassment against their peers (Patton et al., 2014).

Cyberbullying is a huge problem nationwide and affects a large proportion of the adolescent population. The National Crime Victimization Survey is a survey that is weighted to represent the entire 9-12 grade student population that is enrolled in school. According to the data from this survey, in 2011 it was estimated that 2.2 million students experienced cyberbullying (Meier, n.d). This means that 9% of the student population has reported experiencing cyberbullying, which is up from 6.2% in 2009 (Meier, n.d). It is predicted that this number will continue to grow as the number of adolescents with smart phones and access to social media continues to increase. Unfortunately not all adolescents who are victims of cyberbullying report it to an adult.

According to Bullying Statistics (n.d.) only 1 in 10 adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying report to a parent or trusted adult when they have been cyberbullied.

Adolescents who are bystanders to cyberbullying on social media often don't report what is going on to an adult either. According to Lenhart et al., (2011), 88% of adolescents have witnessed other people being mean or cruel to another person on social media sites.

Anyone can be a victim of cyberbullying. Statistics have shown that location, meaning rural, urban or suburban, or school size do not increase or decrease the risk of bullying (Lenhart et al., 2011). Cyberbullying affects all races and genders. Surveys have shown that there are some gender differences between the prevalence of cyberbullying, but both genders are still at risk (Lenhart et al., 2011; Meier, n.d.). Female adolescents have a 22.1% greater chance than males to be a victim of cyberbullying (Meier, n.d.). Adolescents from all races have a chance to be cyberbullied. Studies have not found significant differences between races and victims of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying, just like bullying face-to-face has many negative impacts. The US Department of Health and Human Services found that kids who are cyberbullied are more likely to use drugs and alcohol, skip school, receive poor grades, have lower self-esteem, and have more health problems than those who have not been cyberbullied (US Department of Health and Human Services, n.d). Teens who are victimized often hide these negative feelings from adults because they feel embarrassed that they are being bullied. Victims of cyberbullying can feel lonely and unsafe (Lenhart et al., 2011). While face-to-face bullying happens the majority of the time at school, often in front of witnesses, cyberbullying happens while the victim is in their own home, making a space that may have been safe for the victim suddenly unsafe (Lenhart et al., 2011).

Cyberbullying has also been linked to suicide. Cyber victimization is strongly related to depression and depression is strongly associated with suicide attempts (Bauman, Toomey & Walker, 2013). According to Lenhart et al (2011), teens who are victimized have suicidal thoughts more often than those who have not been a victim. A study that looked at peer harassment, online and traditional bullying, and thoughts about suicide found that victims of cyberbullying and traditional bullying scored higher on a scale of suicidal ideation than students that were not victims of bullying of any kind (Palmeri, 2011). Because cyberbullying leads to higher suicidal ideation in students it also leads to more suicide attempts by students.

Everyone has a right to human dignity. According to the Social work for social justice: Ten principles, everyone has a right to feel safe and respected. When someone is cyberbullied, this right is violated (School of Social Work, 2006). Teens who are victimized often don't feel safe in their home, school, or at extracurricular activities. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (n.d.), 160,000 students per day stay home from school because they feel unsafe to go because of bullying. This raises a huge problem resulting in many students having truancy issues and wanting to drop out of school.

The purpose of this paper was to explore the experiences of adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying. This research paper summarizes what the literature has already discovered about the experiences of cyberbullying for adolescents who have been victimized. The method for obtaining information is described and the findings are presented using descriptive statistics, independent t-test, and content analysis. Finally, an interpretation and discussion of the findings and suggestions for future research is discussed.

## **Literature Review**

### **Social Networking Sites**

Social networking sites have become increasingly more popular among the adolescent population. The term social networking sites encompasses a broad range of sites, so it is important to have an operational definition. For the purpose of most research studies, a social networking site (SNS) is defined as a web-based service that allows an individual to construct a profile within the system that consists of content supplied by the user, by other users, and/or provided by the system and contains a public list of users that they have control over with whom they can make connections with, share data with, and/or interact with (Karklins & Dalton, 2012; Dredge, Gleeson & de la Piedad Garcia, 2014). On a SNS, a user is able to meet new people who may share similar interests, be in a similar location, or have similar demographics (Karklins & Dalton, 2012). Popular SNS among teens include Myspace, Facebook, and Twitter, among many others (Sengupta & Chaudhuri 2011).

While social networking sites are available for all ages, it is common for adolescents under the age of 18 to utilize them. According to a study of 144 students, 73.61% of them said they created a social networking site profile when they were under the age of 18 (Karklins & Dalton, 2012). Both males and females are on SNS, but female teens are 63% more likely to have a profile than a teenage male (Sengupta & Chaudhuri, 2011).

Social networking sites are appealing to adolescents because it helps give them a sense of belonging. Being a part of a group on a SNS instills a sense of membership within the adolescent (Reich, 2010). SNS such as Facebook and Myspace help adolescents explore their identity through building and maintaining different connections to others (Reich, 2010).

### **Cyberbullying on the Internet**

Cyberbullying is the act of bullying in cyberspace by spreading rumors, making threats, posting embarrassing information or pictures, sending threatening messages, or any other means of bullying and is defined as behavior that is intentional and harmful, inflicted through technological mediums (Walrave & Heriman, 2011). Cyberbullying can occur through mobile phones, email, chat rooms, web pages, instant messaging, and social networking sites.

There are multiple ways for teens who cyberbully to harass users on SNS. The most common ways are: to post cruel messages or threats on the victim's profile, send cruel private messages to the victim, post cruel messages or threats on someone else's profile about the victim, or to upload nasty or embarrassing pictures of the victim on a SNS (Dredge, Gleeson & de la Piedad Garcia, 2014). Cyberbullying on SNS is appealing because it can be done both publicly and privately. Dredge, Gleeson and de la Piedad Garcia (2014) found that both ways were used almost equally as frequent. Facebook users have the ability to post information publicly and they also can use a messaging system where they can send information to people privately.

**Prevalence of cyberbullying.** With the increase in Internet use over the years, cyberbullying has become more common. In a survey of 935 teenagers ages 12-17, over 25% reported experiencing some kind of cyberbullying (Sengupta & Chaudhuri, 2011). This study also looked at those who have profiles on SNS and found that 40% had been cyberbullied in some way, showing that more people had been harassed if they had an SNS profile (Sengupta & Chaudhuri). Another study found that of the 799 participants, 69 (8.6%) were classified as cyberbully victims (Schenk, 2011).

A study done by Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, and Coulter (2012) used data from a regional census of high school students to look at the prevalence of cyberbullying and school bullying. This study found that of the 20,000 students in the census, 15.8% reported being victimized by cyberbullying (Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012).

When looking at the prevalence of cyberbullying, it is also important to take into account how many times a victim has been cyberbullied. A study done by Li (2007) looked at the prevalence rates of cyberbullying and how many times a victim was cyberbullied. This study collected data from 264 seventh grade students from Canada and 197 seventh grade students from China. Li (2007) found that 28.9% of the students reported being victimized by cyberbullying and 17.8% reported cyberbullying others. Of the students who reported being victimized by cyberbullying, 54.9% reported being harassed less than four times, 20.3% reported being harassed between four and 10 times, and 21.1% reported being harassed 10 or more times (Li, 2007). By viewing the prevalence of cyberbullying, it shows that cyberbullying is an issue. But, when viewing the prevalence of cyberbullying and how many times victims have been bullied it shows that cyberbullying is an even bigger issue.

Cyberbullying is a concerning issue because it can be done from a person's home and is often done anonymously. A study done by Dehue, Bolman, and Vollink (2008), found that of the 1,211 students surveyed, 16% had bullied someone on cyberspace and 22% had been bullied on cyberspace by someone at least once during the present school year. Of those who had been bullied, 34.8% did not know the identity of the bullier, meaning the bullying was anonymous (Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008). It was also found that 85.6% of the students who cyberbullied engaged in bullying while at their house and majority of them (62.97%) were alone while doing so (Dehue, Bolman & Vollink, 2008).

These studies show that there is a significant portion of adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying at least once in their life, this proves that cyberbullying is a prevalent problem among the adolescent population. With the increase in smartphones and access to social networking sites it can be suggested that the number of adolescents victimized by cyberbullying will continue to increase.

### **Teens Who Cyberbully**

Studies have examined reasons why cyberbullies feel the need to bully others and whether or not there are common characteristics between teens who cyberbully. Walrave and Heriman (2011) found that the three most common motives behind cyberbullying, reported by teens who cyberbully, are that it was revenge to the victim, that the victim deserved it, or just because it was fun. Gender differences between teens who cyberbully is often controversial, but it has been found that teens who cyberbully are more often males (Walrave & Heriman, 2011).

Adolescents who have reported recent problems at school, assaultive behaviors, or report using illegal substances were more likely to cyberbully (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Another study found that the teens who cyberbully are in need of social support, have unhappy feelings, and are eager to use drugs (Sahin, 2012). Both male and female teens who cyberbully scored a lower affective empathy score than victims of cyberbullying, teens who both cyberbullied and were victims of cyberbullying, and those who were not involved in cyberbullying at all (Pettalia, Levin & Dickinson, 2013). This suggests that teens who cyberbully often are not affected by the emotions that others feel.

**Cyberbully-victim.** A Cyberbully-victim is someone who reports at least one incident where they have been perpetrating cyberbully behavior and at least one incident where they were a victim of cyberbullying (Pettalia, Levin & Dickinson, 2013). A study by Pettalia, Levin &

Dickinson (2013) found that 44.6% of the adolescents surveyed identified as being a teen who has both bullied and been victimized. This is significantly higher than those who identified as being a teen who has been victimized (17.3%) and those who identified as being a teen who cyberbullies (5%) (Pettalia, Levin & Dickinson, 2013).

Bullies can turn into victims, and victims can turn into bullies. A teen who cyberbullies is six times more likely to be victimized on a SNS after they have bullied (Walrave & Heriman, 2011). But, a teen who is a victim of cyberbullying is nine times more likely to engage in cyberbullying after they have been bullied than those who have not been victimized (Walrave & Heriman, 2011). It has been found that teens who are victimized often feel hostile and angry after being bullied (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007), which could be fueling their bullying behaviors.

### **Teens Who Are Victimized**

Many studies have found that the amount of time an adolescent spends on the Internet and the information they display affects their chances of being a victim of cyberbullying (Sengupta & Chaudhuri, 2011; Walrave & Heriman, 2011; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007).

Adolescents who use the Internet more frequently experienced cyberbullying more than those who used the Internet less frequently (Walrave & Heriman, 2011; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007). On a SNS, adolescents are able to disclose personal information about themselves. Sengupta and Chaudhuri (2011) found that disclosing private information, uploading a picture of oneself, or disclosing information about the school they attend puts them at an increased risk for online harassment.

Studies have shown that teens who have been victimized can have negative emotional experiences (Bauman, Toomey & Walker, 2013; Dredge, Gleeson, & Garcia, 2014; Gimenez, 2015; Sahin, 2012; Schenk, 2011). A study done by Dredge, Gleeson, and Garcia (2014) found

that of the 25 adolescent victims interviewed, 100% of them reported a negative emotional impact resulting from the cyberbullying. Gimenez et al, (2015) found that an adolescent who had been victimized often felt sad and rejected afterwards. Adolescents who have been victimized reported feelings of unhappiness and were lonelier than teens who cyberbullied (Sahin, 2012). Along with that, those who have been victimized on SNS report depression more frequently than those who have not been victimized (Bauman, Toomey, & Walker, 2013). A study done by Schenk (2011) found that adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying reported significantly elevated levels of depression, anxiety, phobic anxiety, and paranoia when compared to the control participants, or those who have not been victimized.

There is a strong link between depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts, but, there is a lot of controversy over whether it is cyberbullying that predicts suicide or whether it is the depression that results from cyberbullying that predicts it. Studies have found that because there is a link between depression and suicide and a link between cyberbully victimization and depression, that there is a link between cyberbully victimization and suicidal thoughts and attempts (Bauman, Toomey & Walker, 2013; Litwiller & Brausch, 2013; Schenk, 2011). Litwiller and Brausch (2013) found that cyberbullying actually predicted suicidal ideation, suicide behavior, and suicide attempts in the victim. Another study which surveyed 799 adolescents found that 5.7% of the adolescents victimized by cyberbullying reported attempting suicide versus 0.0% reported attempts from the control group (Schenk, 2011). Schenk also found that 10.1% of respondents victimized by cyberbullying reported suicidal ideations versus 0.0% of control group participants (2011). This suggests that there is a direct link between cyberbully victimization and suicidal ideation and attempts.

**Gender Differences.** The current literature looking at gender differences among cyberbullies and adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying is not consistent. Some studies report there being a significant gender difference, while others report no difference. In a study done by Schenk (2011), there was no gender difference found among the 8.6% of participants who reported being a cyberbully victim. This also supports the results found in a study done by Hinduja and Patchin (2008) that there is no significant gender difference between adolescents victimized by cyberbullying.

On the other hand, a study done by Sengupta and Chaudhuri (2011) found that female teenagers that are on social networking sites are 250% more likely to be harassed online or contacted by unwanted strangers compared to males. A study done by Li (2007) found that of the 133 seventh grade students that reported being victimized by cyberbullying, 31.2% were male and 26.3% were female. This study also found that of the 82 participants that said they have cyberbullied someone, 21.9% of them were males and 13.4% were female. Other studies have found that there is no gender difference between cyberbully perpetrators, but found that female victims are significantly more likely to be victimized by cyberbullying than males (Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008; Walrave & Heriman, 2011).

Current research examines the various impacts adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying experience. There is a current gap in the literature looking to see if there are any gender differences between the impacts adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying experience. A qualitative study done by Dredge, Gleeson, and Garcia (2014) interviewed adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying. While this study found good information regarding the experiences of these adolescent victims, the data was not compared between genders. This is consistent with a study done by Pettalia, Levin, and Dickinson (2013).

In this study they looked at the various impacts of cyberbullying but did not compare these impacts between genders (Pettalia, Levin & Dickinson, 2013).

Where the literature is lacking is looking at how being a teen who has been victimized by cyberbullying affects other parts of their life. The current literature reviews how being victimized can have negative effects on an adolescent emotionally, but does not look at the other factors in their life, like school for example. Because cyberbullying has such major implications, it can be assumed that an adolescent's experience goes beyond emotional effects. Current literature is also not consistent on whether or not there is a significant gender difference between adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying as well as the impact cyberbullying has on the victim. Considering this, it is worth a further study to investigate the experiences of adolescents who have been victimized.

The research question being proposed are: What are the experiences of high school students who have been victims of cyberbullying on social networking sites?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The ecological framework is the idea that a person's development is affected by everything in their changing environment throughout their lifespan (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Bronfenbrenner found that there are four levels within the ecological framework: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (1977). The ecological framework can provide conceptual guidance when examining cyberbullying. When a high school student is victimized by cyberbullying, it can affect all aspects of their life, including their microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Espelage, Rao & Rue, 2013). For example, a cyberbully victim reports higher levels of depression, feeling lonely, and school avoidance (Espelage, Rao & Rue, 2013; Sahin, 2012). This example shows how being victimized by cyberbullying affects the

victim at a micro level through the psychological impacts and at a mezzo level through school avoidance.

The ecological framework aligns well with this study because it views all aspects of how cyberbullying can impact various parts of an adolescent's life. This framework helped guide the questions composed in the survey instrument by having questions that address the micro (e.g. I felt sad after being victimized by cyberbullying) and mezzo levels (e.g. I stopped going to school after being victimized by cyberbullying). Framing questions using the ecological framework will help identify the combined impacts cyberbullying has on an adolescent victim (Espelage, L., Rao, M., & Rue, L., 2013). Therefore, this paper uses the framework to help view cyberbullying victimization.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

The research method that was used to study these hypotheses was a mixed methods approach. The more dominant approach was quantitative, while there was some qualitative questions to add depth.

A quantitative approach was chosen as the more dominant approach because this study was looking at human behavior. According to Monette, Sullivan, and DeJong (2010), a quantitative approach is most appropriate to use when looking at precise human behavior. This study added in a qualitative approach because using only a quantitative method could cause very important parts of the human experience to be missed, including personal meanings, feelings, and the subjective experience (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2010). Using a mixed methods approach allowed the precise human behavior and experience to be researched along with the subjective experience, personal meanings, and feelings the participant may have.

This study was a retrospective study. This means the participants in this study were not asked about their current experiences, but asked to reflect back on their past experiences from high school. The time frame the participants were asked to reflect back to was between grades 9-12. The participants answered the questions based on their experiences during that time frame, excluding any current experiences.

### **Sample**

This study consisted of 26 participants, who identified as 'female' (n=24), 'male' (n=1), and 'other' (n=1). The participants in this study were selected based on their age and being a current student at the University of St. Thomas or St. Catherine University and enrolled in the Bachelors of Social Work program. The participants were ages 18-22 years old and were a mixture of freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

Participants were recruited through emails that were sent out to undergraduate students enrolled in the Bachelors of Social Work program at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University by the Bachelors of Social Work Program Director, Sarah Ferguson. The researcher provided an email script to Sarah Ferguson that explained the purpose of the study, why they were chosen to participate, the voluntary nature of the study, confidentiality, how to contact the researcher with any questions, and provided the link to participate (see appendix A)

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

Directly prior to filling out the survey, the respondent was provided with a consent form that was approved by the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University Institutional Review Boards (IRB). The consent form explained the background of the study, outlined the confidentiality procedures, explained any risks and benefits, and explained how the participant has the freedom to withdraw from the survey at any time (see appendix B). The consent form

appeared as the very first screen of the survey. The participant read through the consent form and had to click 'I agree' to continue participating in the survey or 'I disagree' to withdraw from the survey.

To ensure confidentiality, there was no identifying demographic questions asked. There was no way for the researcher to identify who participated in the survey as it was all done anonymously online. The survey was distributed through an anonymous survey link. This feature allowed no identifying information, such as email addresses, to be collected.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection instrument that was used was an online survey. The survey was adopted from a study done by Schenk (2011) entitled Internet Experiences Questionnaire (IEQ). The survey was comprised of questions that could be answered in a variety of ways. There were open-ended questions where the participant was able to fill in their own responses (e.g. *If you have been the victim of cyberbullying, what was the reason someone did this to you?*). There were also multiple-choice questions where only one answer could be selected (e.g. *During your time in high school, have you received harassing, mean, or nasty text-messages? Yes or No*). Lastly, there were questions that allowed the participant to select several answers (e.g. *What do you think the motive was for someone to cyberbully you? Please check all that apply: Jealousy, Anger, Revenge, etc.*). See appendix C.

The survey included questions regarding demographics, general cyberbullying questions, questions regarding cyberbully victimization, and its impact. Because Schenk (2011) focused on college-aged participants and this study is retrospective, asking college-aged participants to reflect back on their experiences from high school, this survey had minor changes to better reflect the current population being surveyed. For example, the question *On average, how much*

*money do you spend each month on Internet and cell phone bills* was omitted because the survey participants are reflecting back to their high school experience and this question is not likely applicable.

There were 20 impact response statements included in the survey, for example, *I felt sad or hurt*. In order to test the impact of cyberbullying on suicidal thoughts, the 20 impact response statements were classified into two categories: emotional and behavioral. For the purpose of this study, emotional responses were defined as responses that were experienced inward and were more difficult for other people to notice (e.g. *I felt sad or hurt, I felt anxious, I felt lonely*). There were a total of 13 emotional responses that created an emotional impact score for each respondent. Behavioral responses were defined as responses that were experienced outward and were more easily noticed by other people (e.g. *I missed school because of it, I cried, I acted out*). There were a total of seven behavioral responses that created a behavioral impact score for each respondent.

### **Data Analysis**

The original research questions proposed in this study were: What are the experiences of high school students who have been victims of cyberbullying on social networking sites? Are there gender differences between males and females in the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying? The hypotheses of this study were: Females will report being victimized by cyberbullying more often than males, and, females who have been victimized by cyberbullying will report experiencing a greater negative psycho-social impact than males. There were 26 respondents to this survey, 24 'female', one 'male', and one 'other' gender. Due to having only one male participant, this study was unable to analyze gender differences, and therefore, unable to test the stated hypotheses. Due to the gender response rate, this study was unable to analyze

the overall impact of cyberbullying related to gender. The responses did allow analysis of the second research question: What are the experiences of high school students who have been victims of cyberbullying on social networking sites? Given that the initial hypotheses did not have the data to test them, new hypotheses were created. The new hypotheses of this study were: (1) There is a significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their overall impact score; (2) there is a significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their emotional impact score; and (3) there is a significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their behavioral impact score.

The data will be analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. A qualitative analysis was used to analyze the three open ended questions: *If you were a victim of cyberbullying, what was the reason someone did this to you? (27); If you were the victim of cyberbullying on a social networking site, how did this impact you? (29); If you were a victim of cyberbullying on a social networking site, how did you cope with the experience? (31)*. The qualitative data was analyzed using a content analysis approach. Content analysis is an objective coding scheme that uses counts of the text to organize and retrieve data (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2010). Using this analysis technique, the researcher looked for common themes in the open ended questions and counted the number of times those themes appeared.

The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent t-test. Descriptive statistics provided a basic description of occurrences in the data, the mean, median, mode, range, and standard deviation (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2010). Using descriptive

statistics, the researcher analyzed the most common form of bullying and the most common impact reported by respondents who were victimized on social networking sites.

An independent t-test was used to analyze the overall impact of cyberbullying between those who reported suicidal thoughts and those who did not report suicidal thoughts. Using an independent t-test, the researcher was able to test the three hypotheses allowing the researcher to see if there is a significant difference between suicidal thoughts and the overall, emotional, and behavioral impact scores.

### **Results**

The research questions proposed in this study were: What are the experiences of high school students who have been victims of cyberbullying on social networking sites? Are there differences between suicidal thoughts and the impact of cyberbullying? The three hypotheses of this study were: (1) There is a significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their overall impact score; (2) there is a significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their emotional impact score; and (3) there is a significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their behavioral impact score.

The sections below will report these findings including sample, the most common form of cyberbullying, the overall impact of cyberbullying on high school students, and the impact of cyberbullying on suicidal thoughts.

### **Sample**

The survey was distributed to all of the students enrolled in the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University Bachelors of Social Work program. There were 28 respondents;

however, two surveys were removed due to invalid and incomplete information, leaving a sample of 26 respondents. The age of the respondents ranged from 18-22 years old, with majority of respondents age 20 (43%). Majority of respondents were female (93%) and in their junior year of school (42%). Table 1 displays demographic results of age, gender, and year in school.

Table 1. *Demographic Table*

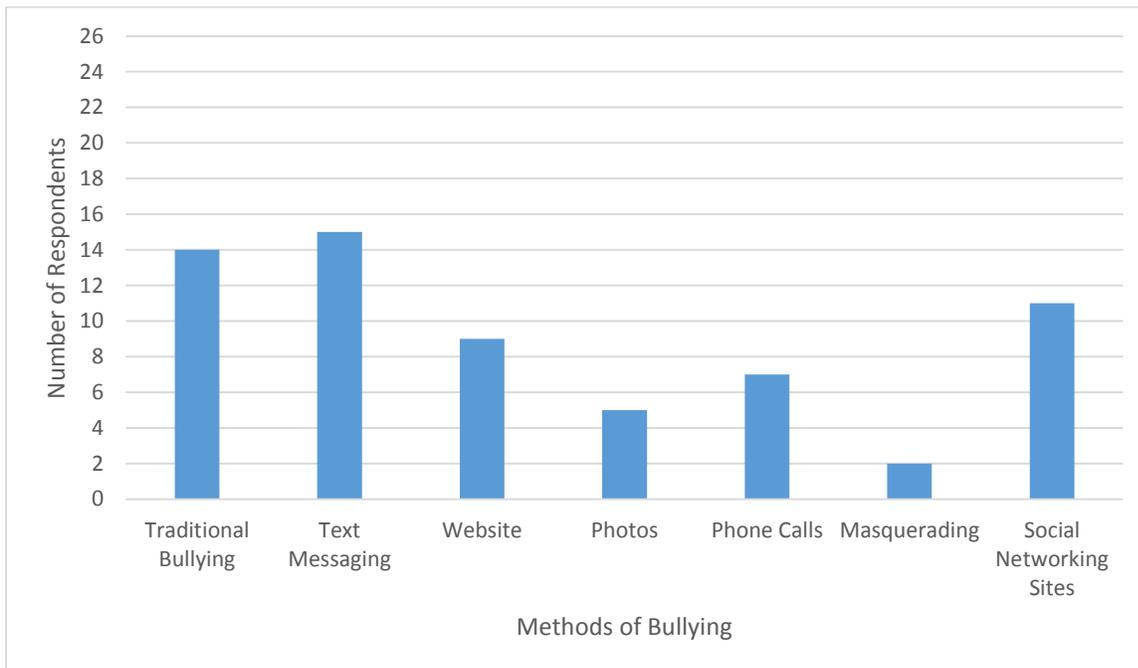
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Age		
18	3	12%
19	4	15%
20	11	43%
21	4	15%
22	4	15%
<b>Total</b>	26	100%
Gender		
Male	1	4%
Female	24	93%
Transgender	0	0%
Other	1	4%
<b>Total</b>	26	100%
Year in School		
Freshman	3	12%
Sophomore	6	23%
Junior	11	42%
Senior	6	23%
<b>Total</b>	26	100%

### **Most Common Method of Cyberbullying**

The survey asked respondents if they were ever victims of bullying through seven different methods including: traditional bullying (face to face, in person bullying), text messaging, someone creating a website about them, someone sending embarrassing photos of them, repeated phone calls, masquerading, and social networking sites.

As seen in Figure 1, the findings showed that the most common method of bullying was through text messaging, with 15 participants reporting having been bullied through text messaging. The next most common were those who reported being bullied through traditional bullying (14) followed by participants who reported being bullied through social networking sites (11).

Figure 1. *Methods of Bullying*



### **Overall Impact of Cyberbullying**

To assess how participants responded to being victimized by cyberbullying and the impacts it had on them, the survey had 20 different potential responses (e.g. *I felt sad or hurt, I felt angry, I cried, I acted out*, see appendix C, question 34 for remaining responses). The participants could select from the list of impact responses to describe whether or not they responded in that way after being victimized by cyberbullying and the intensity of that response. Participants rated each response on a 5-point Likert Scale. The possible response options ranged from 1 (“Never”) to 5 (“Almost Every day”), 1 meaning they never responded in that way and 5

meaning they responded in that way almost every day after being cyberbullied. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the mean of each individual impact.

As displayed in Table 2, 'I felt sad or hurt' was the most common response identified by participants, with a mean score of 4.40. The next most common response was 'I felt frustrated', with a mean of 4.30, followed by 'I felt embarrassed' with a mean of 4.10.

Table 2 also shows that the minimum value for 'I felt sad or hurt' and 'I felt frustrated' was 3 ('A Few Times'). This means that all respondents who were victimized by cyberbullying identified feeling sad, hurt, or frustrated at least a few times. The minimum values for 'I felt angry', 'I felt embarrassed', 'I felt helpless and/or hopeless', 'I cried', 'I felt lonely', and 'I felt ashamed' was 2 ('Once or Twice'). This means that all respondents who were victimized by cyberbullying identified experiencing those responses at least once or twice.

Table 2. *Mean Impact Score*

Response	Min Value	Max Value	Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation
I felt sad or hurt	3	5	4.40	.49	.70
I felt angry	2	5	3.88	.98	.99
I felt embarrassed	2	5	4.10	1.12	1.10
I felt afraid	1	5	2.90	1.88	1.37
I felt anxious	1	5	4.00	2.22	1.49
I felt helpless and/or hopeless	2	5	4.00	1.25	1.12
I felt frustrated	3	5	4.30	.90	.95
I was stressed	1	5	4.00	1.78	1.33
I missed school because of it	1	4	2.50	1.61	1.27
I cried	2	5	3.70	.90	.95
I had difficulty concentrating	1	5	2.90	1.66	1.29
My grades have dropped because of it	1	3	1.80	.84	.92
I became jumpy or irritable	1	5	3.20	2.18	1.48
I thought about the online harassment almost constantly	1	5	3.10	2.99	1.73
I stopped doing activities I once enjoyed	1	4	2.40	1.38	1.17
I acted out	1	4	1.60	1.16	1.07
I blamed myself	1	5	2.80	2.40	1.55
I felt lonely	2	5	3.60	1.38	1.17
I felt depressed	1	5	3.70	2.46	1.57
I felt ashamed	2	5	3.40	.93	.97

### **Impact of Cyberbullying on Suicidal Thoughts**

To test the impact of cyberbullying on suicidal thoughts, the 20 impact response statements were classified into two categories: emotional and behavioral. For the purpose of this study, emotional responses were defined as responses that were experienced inward and were more difficult for other people to notice (e.g. *I felt sad or hurt, I felt anxious, I felt lonely*).

Behavioral responses were defined as responses that were experienced outward and were more

easily noticed by other people (e.g. *I missed school because of it, I cried, I acted out*). There were a total of 13 emotional responses and seven behavioral responses. The 13 emotional responses created an emotional impact score for each respondent and the seven behavioral responses created a behavioral impact score for each respondent. Each respondents overall impact score is comprised of the 20 impact response statements.

The question "*If you were a victim of cyberbullying, have you ever had thoughts of suicide*"(35) originally had four response options: No, Yes, Yes with a plan, and Yes with an attempt. The answers were recoded into 'No' (1) and 'Yes' (2), recoding yes with a plan and yes with an attempt into the 'Yes' value. The respondent who identified as 'other' gender reported the only suicide attempt. Three independent t-tests were computed to see if there is a statistically significant difference between the overall impact of cyberbullying and suicidal thoughts, the emotional impact of cyberbullying and suicidal thoughts, and the behavioral impact of cyberbullying and suicidal thoughts.

There were four participants who have been victimized by cyberbullying on a social networking site who responded 'no' to ever having suicidal thoughts. There were seven participants who have been victimized by cyberbullying on social networking sites, including the participant with an attempt, who responded 'yes' to ever having suicidal thoughts. Two of the participants who have been victimized by cyberbullying responded 'yes' to having suicidal thoughts but did not answer any of the 20 impact response questions. Because they did not answer the impact response questions, they did not have an impact score and therefore their data was omitted from the independent t-test analyses.

**Overall impact of cyberbullying.** The independent variable measured whether respondents who were victimized by cyberbullying had suicidal thoughts or not. The dependent

variable measured the respondents overall impact score. The research hypothesis is: There is a significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their overall impact score. The null hypothesis for the study is: There is no significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their overall impact score.

Table 3 displays the results of the t-test comparing overall impact score and suicidal thoughts. The Levene’s Test of Equality of Variance for the independent samples t-test is .422. Since .422 is greater than .05, the Levene’s Test is not significant. Therefore, the p-value for this t-test is .647. Since the p-value is greater than .05, the results of this data are not statistically significant. As a result, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their overall impact score. Therefore, there is not a significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their responses to being victimized by cyberbullying.

Table 3. *Independent T-Test for Overall Impact Score and Suicidal Thoughts*

Independent Samples Test									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Impact Equal variances assumed	.798	.422	-.495	4	.647	-8.667	17.509	-57.279	39.945
Impact Equal variances not assumed			-.495	3.594	.649	-8.667	17.509	-59.521	42.188

**Emotional impact of cyberbullying.** The independent variable measured whether respondents who were victimized by cyberbullying had suicidal thoughts or not. The dependent variable measured the respondent's emotional impact score. The research hypothesis is: There is a significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their emotional impact score. The null hypothesis for the study is: There is no significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their emotional impact score.

Tables four and five display the results of the t-test comparing the mean difference in emotional impact score between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not. The mean score of respondents without suicidal thoughts was 40.00. The mean score of participants with suicidal thoughts was 50.80. The difference between the mean scores was 10.80. Therefore, participants with suicidal thoughts reported a higher emotional impact score.

The Levene's Test of Equality of Variance for the independent samples t-test is .796. Since .796 is greater than .05, the Levene's Test is not significant. Therefore, the p-value for this t-test is .241. Since the p-value is greater than .05, the results of this data are not statistically significant. As a result, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their emotional impact score. Therefore, there is not a significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their emotional responses to being victimized by cyberbullying.

Table 4. *Group Statistics for Emotional Impact Score and Suicidal Thoughts*

Group Statistics					
	SuicideR	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Emotional	1.00	4	40.00	12.055	6.028
	2.00	5	50.80	12.950	5.791

Table 5. *Independent T-Test for Emotional Impact Score and Suicidal Thoughts*

Independent Samples Test									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Emotional Equal variances assumed	.072	.796	1.280	7	.241	-10.800	8.435	-30.746	9.146
Emotional Equal variances not assumed			1.292	6.769	.239	-10.800	8.359	-30.704	9.104

**Behavioral impact of cyberbullying.** The independent variable measured whether respondents who were victimized by cyberbullying had suicidal thoughts or not. The dependent variable measured the respondent's behavioral impact score. The research hypothesis is: There is a significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their behavioral impact score. The null hypothesis for the study is: There is no significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their behavioral impact score.

Tables five and six display the results of the t-test comparing the mean difference in behavioral impact score between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not. The mean score of respondents without suicidal thoughts was 16.75. The mean score of respondents with suicidal thoughts was 20.20. The difference between the mean scores was 3.45. Therefore, participants with suicidal thoughts reported a higher behavioral impact score.

The Levene's Test of Equality of Variance for the independent samples t-test is .787. Since .787 is greater than .05, the Levene's Test is not significant. Therefore, the p-value for this t-test is .452. Since the p-value is greater than .05, the results of this data are not statistically significant. As a result, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their behavioral impact score. Therefore, there is not a significant difference between respondents who had suicidal thoughts and those who did not have suicidal thoughts on their behavioral responses to being victimized by cyberbullying.

Table 5. *Group Statistics for Behavioral Impact Score and Suicidal Thoughts*

Group Statistics					
	SuicideR	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Behavioral	1.00	4	16.75	6.652	3.326
	2.00	5	20.20	6.301	2.818

Table 6. *Independent T-Test for Behavioral Impact Score and Suicidal Thoughts*

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Behavioral	Equal variances assumed	.079	.787	-.797	7	.452	-3.450	4.329	-13.687	6.787
	Equal variances not assumed			-.791	6.385	.457	-3.450	4.359	-13.963	7.063

**Qualitative Analysis**

The survey had three qualitative questions: *If you were a victim of cyberbullying, what was the reason someone did this to you? (27); If you were the victim of cyberbullying on a social networking site, how did this impact you? (29); If you were a victim of cyberbullying on a social networking site, how did you cope with the experience? (31).* Each question was analyzed separately using content analysis to find common themes among the respondents answers.

**What reasons did someone do this to you?** After interpreting the responses for this question, three main themes emerged: jealousy, not fitting in, and falling out with friends.

**Jealousy.** Jealousy was identified as a theme for the reason someone cyberbullied the respondent and is supported by the following quote:

*I was good friends with her new boyfriend and she was jealous...*

Multiple respondents put a single word answer just saying “jealousy” as their sole reason someone cyberbullied them and did not go into detail.

***Not fitting in.*** Not fitting in was identified as a theme for the reason someone cyberbullied the respondent and is supported by the following quote:

*I come from a very small town with a small school where everyone knows everyone. I didn't fit the norm, and I didn't want to fit the norm.*

Respondents also stated that being overweight and not fitting in because of that was a reason for being cyberbullied and is supported by the following quote:

*My weight. Appearances.*

***Falling out with friends.*** Having a falling out with a friend or friends was identified as a theme for the reason someone cyberbullied the respondent and is supported by the following quote:

*I had a falling out with a friend, so she posted things about me and my character.*

Multiple participants talked about how they were once friends with someone or they thought someone was their friend and then that person turned on them and began to bully them on weaknesses of theirs and is supported by the following quote:

*Not sure they seemed like they were my friend and then turned behind my back and did it.*

**How did this impact you?** After interpreting the responses for this question, two main themes emerged: experiencing negative emotional impact and lowered self-esteem.

***Experiencing negative emotional impact.*** Many respondents stated they experienced negative emotional impacts including feeling depressed, sad, upset, and hurt after they were victimized by cyberbullying on social networking sites. This is supported by the following quotes:

*I became very sad and depressed. I started questioning my own worth.*

Another participant responded:

*It hurt me a lot and made me cry.. A LOT. I contemplated suicide many times.*

Participants who experienced negative emotional impacts after being victimized by cyberbullying also appeared to question who they are, which is supported by the following quote:

*I questioned who I was a lot, and I became depressed.*

**Lowered self-esteem.** Having a lowered self-esteem after being cyberbullied on social networking sites was a theme that emerged and is supported by the following quote:

*Lowered self-esteem, self-consciousness, introversion, depression, anxiety.*

Another participant responded:

*It made me really upset, I stopped eating because I thought I was too fat and felt bad about myself.*

It appears that participants who had a lowered self-esteem as a result of being victimized by cyberbullying also experienced negative emotional impacts. This is demonstrated in the first quote where the respondent states they experienced a lowered self-esteem and also became depressed.

**How did you cope?** After interpreting the responses for this question, one main theme emerged: by seeking out support. This theme is supported by the following quotes:

*I was in a bad place for a long time, but then I went to counseling.*

Another respondent stated:

*At first, I disconnected and started to self-harm. After a while, I found a group of people with no ties to my school who were supportive. I turned things around and began volunteering.*

Although it was not a significant theme, one respondent coped by keeping it to themselves. One respondent told their story of how they were cyberbullied by an older man they met on an internet gaming site. The respondent and the man formed an online relationship that went on for a while. The respondent felt comfort in talking with this man and believed he was one of their only friends at the time that they could trust. Having his support helped the respondent cope with their already existing depression. He took advantage of the respondent and mentally and emotionally abused them without the respondent even realizing it. The respondent did not realize the level of inappropriateness their relationship was at until this man's wife emailed them asking who the respondent was. This man had lied to the respondent and said he did not have a wife and kids, when in reality he did. This respondent went on to talk about how this affected her and how they coped, which is supported by the following quote:

*I coped with this in an unhealthy way because I did not tell anyone out of fear of getting in trouble. I experienced anxiety from this situation for a long time and still get worried when I think about it, so I try not to think about it. I apologize for writing so much about this to you - it feels nice to be able to share my experience with someone.*

This respondent found comfort in being able to share their story in an anonymous survey and to get their feelings out.

### **Discussion**

The primary intent of this research study was to explore the experiences of high school students who have been victimized by cyberbullying. A mixed methods approach was utilized to allow the precise human behavior and experience to be researched along with the subjective experience, personal meanings, and feelings the participant may have, which allowed for a more

comprehensive assessment of the research. The results of the survey were then examined through a quantitative and qualitative process.

### **Quantitative Analysis**

Descriptive statistics analysis and independent t-test were the two methods utilized to examine the quantitative data. The descriptive statistics were used to analyze the most common form of cyberbullying, and the overall impact of cyberbullying. The first independent t-test was utilized to examine the relationship between suicidal thoughts and the participants overall impact scale score. The same analysis was then completed to examine the relationship between suicidal thoughts and the participants emotional scale score and between suicidal thoughts and the participants behavioral scale score.

Results indicated that the most common form of bullying was through text messaging, followed by traditional bullying, and then social networking sites. Current literature found that even with the increase in access to electronics, traditional bullying is more common than cyberbullying (Schenk, 2011; Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012). A study done by Schenk (2011) found that the most common method of cyberbully was through text messaging and phone calls, which is congruent with the results of this study. With the increase in smart phones and cell phone use, adolescents are able to access text messaging and the internet easier. This makes it easier for adolescents to bully through electronic means at any time of the day. Traditional bullying often takes place at school (Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012). Bullying through text messaging or over the internet can take place anywhere at any time. Bullying that is done through electronics can be done anonymously much easier than traditional bullying. According to a study done by Sticca and Perren (2013), an adolescent who is victimized by an anonymous bullying was found to be the most severe kind of bullying.

Bullying through electronics can be done anywhere at any time and done anonymously, suggesting that cyberbullying could be done more often and easier than traditional bullying.

Survey results indicated that the most common impact response was emotional and included 'I felt sad or hurt' followed by 'I felt frustrated'. This aligns with previous literature which found that adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying reported feelings of unhappiness and often felt sad and rejected afterwards (Bauman, Toomey, & Walker, 2013; Gimenez et al, 2015; Sahin, 2012). Bauman, Toomey, and Walker (2013) found that adolescents who are victimized by cyberbullying reported higher rates of depression. The results of this survey found that feelings of depression was not as common of a response rate as feeling sad or hurt and feeling helpless and/or hopeless. One could argue that feeling sad, hurt, helpless and hopeless are all common characteristics of depression, which would align with previous literature that depression is a common response to cyberbully victimization.

Survey results from all three of the t-test's indicated no significant relationship between suicidal thoughts and the respondents overall scale score, emotional scale score, and behavioral scale score. This means there is not a significant relationship between the impacts of cyberbully victimization on suicidal thoughts. The results did show a difference in mean scores. The mean score of participants who had suicidal thoughts was higher than those who did not report suicidal thoughts for both the emotional impact score and the behavioral impact score. This means that participants with higher emotional and behavioral impact scores reported having suicidal thoughts. The limited sample size likely contributed to the overall lack of statistical significance of this study.

There were seven participants who have been victimized by cyberbullying on social networking sites who responded 'yes' to ever having suicidal thoughts. Two of these

participants did not fill out the impact response questions, causing their data to be omitted from the independent t-test. Four participants who have been victimized responded 'no' to ever having suicidal thoughts. There were 11 participants who reported being victimized on social networking sites. This means that 63% (n=7) of the participants who reported being victimized by cyberbullying on social networking sites have had suicidal thoughts and 36% (n=4) have not had suicidal thoughts.

Previous research is controversial over whether cyberbullying predicts suicide or not. Studies have found a link between depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts and a link between depression and suicide, but studies have been unable to find if cyberbullying victimization predicts suicide (Bauman, Toomey & Walker, 2013; Litwiller & Brausch, 2013; Schenk, 2011). A study done by Schenk (2011) found that 10% of respondents who were victimized by cyberbullying reported suicidal ideations and 0% of the control group reported them, suggesting a link between cyberbully victimization and suicide.

There was one participant who reported having a suicide attempt after being victimized by cyberbullying. This participant was also the only participant to identify their gender as 'other'. This participant reported that they were cyberbullied because they did not fit in with the rest of their peers and went against the norm. Research has found a link between cyberbullying and sexual orientation. Hinduja and Patchin (2011) found that almost twice as many respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) reported being victimized by cyberbullying in their lifetime (36.1%) compared to heterosexual respondents (20.1%). Hinduja and Patchin also looked at differences in experiences in the previous 30 days of the respondents taking the survey and found that 17.3% of LGBT participants reported being victimized by cyberbullying compared to 6.8% of heterosexual participants (2011). This suggests that

individuals who do not identify as heterosexual are more likely to be bullied based on their sexual orientation. It is important for social workers to be aware of the difficulties adolescents who are viewed as different by their peers face and provide extra support for them when possible.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

A qualitative analysis was completed by examining the three open ended survey questions that primarily focused on the reason the respondent was cyberbullied, the impact it had on them, and how they coped with the victimization. Each question was analyzed for themes separately and as the data was analyzed, themes were developed.

**Reasons for victimization.** Transcription of the qualitative data in this question revealed three primary reasons the respondents believed was the reasoning for being victimized by cyberbullying: jealousy, not fitting in, and falling out with a friend. Walrave and Heriman (2011) found that the three most common motives behind cyberbullying, reported by teens who cyberbully, are that it was revenge to the victim, that the victim deserved it, or just because it was fun. Being victimized because the perpetrator is jealous or was once the victim's friend and they had a falling out could be fueled by revenge to the victim.

The theme of not fitting in aligns with a study done by Hinduja and Patchin (2008) which found that bullies often chose their victim based on their differences. Bullies will seek out those who have differences, whether it is a disability, their looks, or the way they act, bullies will pick up on those differences and tease the victim because of them (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). This directly relates to the respondent who identified their gender as 'other' and was severely bullied. The person described feeling different and not wanting to fit into the norm, and that other people did not like that and would bully in response. Society tries to steer people away from being

different and tries to get everyone to conform, finding what is considered 'normal'. When an adolescent deviates away from what the society sees as normal, a bully picks up on that and tends to bully the person over their differences from society.

**Impact of cyberbullying.** Transcription of the qualitative data in this question revealed two main themes of how participants who were victimized by cyberbullying were impacted: experiencing a negative emotional impact and lowered self-esteem. Negative emotional impacts described by the participant included feeling depressed, sad, upset, hurt, and anxious. This aligns with previous research studies that suggest teens who have been victimized can have negative emotional experiences (Bauman, Toomey & Walker, 2013; Dredge, Gleeson, & Garcia, 2014; Gimenez, 2015; Sahin, 2012). Studies have found that adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying reported feeling sad, feelings of unhappiness, and report depression more frequently than those who have not been victimized (Bauman, Toomey & Walker, 2013; Gimenez, 2015; Sahin, 2012).

A study done by Tokunaga (2010) found that being a victim of cyberbullying can cause psychosocial problems, specifically social anxiety. The negative emotional experiences reported by participants in this study are consistent with those in the literature. In this study, there was not one participant who reported being victimized by cyberbullying who did not experience at least one negative emotional impact. All participants reported being impacted in a negative way.

Respondents who reported experiencing lower levels of self-esteem after being victimized by cyberbullying is consistent with previous research (Brewer & Kerslake, 2015). Brewer and Kerslake (2015) found that adolescents who reported being victimized by cyberbullying also reported low levels of self-esteem. It is not clear if the cyberbully victimization is what caused the lower levels of self-esteem or if the perpetrators targeted those

individuals with lower levels of self-esteem because they were regarded as an 'easy target' (Brewer & Kerslake, 2015). As stated above, perpetrators prey on individuals who are seen as being different than the norm because they are an easy target. This suggests that individuals who have lower levels of self-esteem are more likely to be victimized by cyberbullying because they are seen as an easy target also. More research needs to be done to see if cyberbully victimization results in lower levels of self-esteem.

**Ways of coping.** Analysis of the qualitative data in this question revealed that respondents primarily coped with being victimized by cyberbullying through seeking out support. Participants who were victimized by cyberbullying primarily turned to friends for support, while some turned to their parents, a trusted adult, or a counselor. This is inconsistent with previous research, which found that many of adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying did not talk to anyone about it (Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008). Adolescents who did talk to someone about it talked to their parents or caregivers most and rarely talked to their teachers (Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008). On the other hand, a study done by Schenk (2011) found that college-aged students who were victimized by cyberbullying coped with it by talking with friends and getting support from them. The difference between high school students not talking to anyone and college-aged students turning to their friends for support could be caused by age difference. On the other hand, if adolescents do talk to someone they tend to turn to their parents, where college-aged students turn to their friends. This difference could be caused by the atmosphere high school students and college-aged students are surrounded in. High school students are still living at home with their parents while college-aged students are often living out of the house with their friends. More research should be done looking at the

difference between coping methods between high school students and college-aged students who have been victimized by cyberbullying.

While it was not a primary theme found, one respondent who identified as other gender reported coping with it by ignoring it. The respondent reported being scared to tell anyone about the experience for fear of the man finding them or fearing that they would get in trouble. This respondent told their story and stated that it felt good to be able to share their story with someone. It appears this respondent found benefit in talking about their story, even if it was to someone anonymously.

### **Implications for Social Work**

It is important for social workers to be aware of the impact cyberbullying victimization has on adolescents. Being victimized by cyberbullying appears to impact how an adolescent functions in their day-to-day life. Even if victims are experiencing negative impacts, including feeling sad, depressed, or suicidal, they may not talk with people about their feelings. If a social worker is working with an adolescent who has been bullied, it is likely that adolescent is experiencing negative emotions as a result of it, even if they are not sharing about them.

Although the relationship between an adolescent's cyberbullying victimization and their thoughts of suicide was not significant, the literature suggests a link. This raises a critical safety concern that social workers should be aware of when working with adolescents.

Cyberbullying is a growing problem in today's society impacting the quality of life for adolescents. The findings contribute to the already existing research demonstrating that cyberbullying is a growing problem that needs to be addressed. Social workers should focus on finding a way to address cyberbullying at a macro level and increase supports for adolescents who have been victimized.

Future research should continue to explore any gender differences among the impacts experienced by cyberbully victimization. This study was unable to explore any gender differences due to the limitation among the gender in the sample. Future research should also look into how cyberbully victimization impacts adolescents who identify as homosexual, transgender, or other gender. The current data suggests that adolescents who identify as a gender other than male or female experience more negative emotional impacts compared to those who identify as male or female.

Future research should also continue to explore the link between cyberbully victimization and suicidal ideation. The current data and previous literature suggests a link, but no studies have found a significant and direct relationship between the two.

Finally, future research should look at the prevalence of previous mental health problems, like anxiety, depression, and lower self-esteem in adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying. Studies should be done to see if cyberbullying causes these problems or if they were present before the bullying and were made worse as a result of it.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

A strength of this study was using a mixed method approach. By adding in qualitative questions, the researcher was able to gain more in-depth information regarding the cyberbully victim's experience. The researcher was able to gain knowledge of different impacts and experiences that were not one of the choice answers in the survey. By having open-ended questions, a participant was able to share their story and the researcher was able to gather valuable information regarding this experience.

There were multiple limitations of this study. One limitation was the sample size. The sample in this study was undergraduate college students enrolled in the University of St. Thomas

and St. Catherine University Bachelors of Social Work program. This population is not generalizable to the general population, and is only representative of the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University.

A second limitation was the population used in this study in relation to gender. According to the Council on Social Work Education (2013), majority of full-time and part-time students enrolled in baccalaureate level social work education programs are female. In 2013, 87.2% of students enrolled in bachelor level social work education programs were female while only 12.8% were males (Council on Social Work Education, 2013). Having so many females and so few males enrolled in social work education programs makes it difficult to get a sufficient amount of male participants to study gender differences.

A third limitation was the design of the questionnaire. The design was retrospective and the researcher asked college students to reflect back on their experiences in high school. Because there was a time gap between when the participant experienced the cyberbullying and when they are reporting how it made them feel, it could have caused participants to underreport how it actually made them feel or the true impact being victimized by cyberbullying had on them.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying. This study found that adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying report experiencing negative emotional impacts, which is supported by previous literature. The findings of this study are important and useful for social workers to gain insight into the experiences that adolescents who have been victimized by cyberbullying have had.

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## Appendix A

This survey is for undergraduate students ages 18-22 only.

My name is Hillary Noll and I am a student in the MSW program I am conducting a study about the impacts cyberbullying on social networking sites have on adolescents. I invite you to participate in this research. You were identified as a possible participant because you are currently a student at the University of St. Thomas or St. Catherine University, and may meet the age requirements for this study given your participation in the BSW program, which are ages 18-22. The BSW program has many non-traditional age students who would not be eligible.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of former high school students who have been victims of cyberbullying. This study aims to look at the impacts cyberbullying has on high school students through assessing information filled out in a survey by college student's ages 18-22 who are reflecting back on their high school experience.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision on whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas, St. Catherine University, and the School of Social Work. This study is done completely anonymously online. There will be no identifying information asked and no way for me to identify who participated in this study.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to complete the following online survey comprised of multiple choice and open-ended questions. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes.

Please click the following link to participate in this study:

Thank you for your participation.

If you have any questions you can contact me at [Noll3072@stthomas.edu](mailto:Noll3072@stthomas.edu)

## Appendix B

**UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS****Cyberbullying: Impacting today's Youth**

832220-1

**Please read this carefully before you decide to participate in this survey**

This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

I am conducting a study about the impacts cyberbullying on social networking sites have on adolescents. I invite you to participate in this research. I hope to find more information regarding the psycho-social impact cyberbullying has on high school students. This information will be helpful to social workers and anyone else working with vulnerable adolescents because it will help them better understand the adolescent victims experiences and what they could be feeling as a result of the cyberbullying. You were identified as a possible participant because you meet the age requirements for this study.

This study is being conducted by: Hillary Noll, a graduate student at the School of Social Work, University of St. Thomas and is supervised by Melissa Lundquist.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: Complete the following online survey comprised of multiple choice and open ended questions regarding cyberbullying. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. This survey will consist of approximately 40-50 participants.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

This study has several risks. First, this study will ask you to recall your experiences being a cyberbully or being victimized by cyberbullying, which could potentially be a traumatic or distressing event. Second, this study could cause possible emotional distress due to recalling that traumatic event. Third, this study will be probing for information about your experience with cyberbullying which is personal and sensitive information. Fourth, because this survey is asking about sensitive information about a potentially traumatic time, it could cause you to feel mentally fatigued or embarrassed. If you become distressed, upset, or fatigued while filling out the survey, you have the right to withdraw at any time.

If this survey causes you to feel upset, re-traumatized, or distressed in anyway, please contact the Counseling and Psychological Services offered by the University of St. Thomas or the Crisis Connection Hotline. St. Thomas Counseling and Psychological Services is a service that provides counseling and other helpful services to all St. Thomas students. The services offered include individual and group counseling, crisis and emergency numbers, and general information about the center. <http://www.stthomas.edu/counseling/>. The Crisis Connection Hotline is a free resource to anyone who is struggling and needs help or someone to talk to and can be contacted at 612-379-6363.

If this survey caused you to feel re-traumatized and you feel you are in immediate danger and cannot keep yourself safe, please call 911.

This study has no direct benefits.

**Confidentiality:**

This survey is designed to be completely anonymous. There will be no identifying information asked and no way to identify who participated in this study. Information based on the results of this study will be published. The data will be kept until June 1, 2016 and then will be destroyed.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas or your professors. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time throughout the survey without penalty by clicking the 'X' in the top right corner which will close the browser and allow you to exit the survey. Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you will not be used in the study. You are also free to skip any questions on the survey.

**Contacts and Questions:**

My name is Hillary Noll. If you have any questions regarding the survey or the study, you may contact me at Noll3072@stthomas.edu or 612-799-3532. You may also contact my research advisor, Melissa Lundquist at Lund1429@stthomas.edu or 651-962-5813. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 with any questions or concerns.

**Consent Questions:**

Before you agree or disagree to participation, please ask yourself these questions and make sure that you can answer them. If you cannot answer a question, please revisit the information on this page or call me before you take this survey.

1. What should you do if you wish to withdraw from this survey?
2. What are the risks if you choose to participate?
3. What resources should you utilize if you experience these risks?
4. Who do you contact if you have any questions regarding this survey?

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have been able to answer the above questions. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. By clicking "I agree" it means you consent to participate in the following study. By clicking "I disagree" it means you do not consent to participate in the following study, which will not allow you to participate in the survey.

I agree

I disagree

## Appendix C

Tell us about yourself:

The following questions address information regarding your personal characteristics and experiences. Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. If you feel uncomfortable answering any questions you may decline to answer it.

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
  2. How do you identify your gender?
  3. What is your current class status? (check one):  
Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Other
  4. Have you ever sought mental health counseling?  
Yes No
  5. Approximately how many hours are you online on a typical day?
- 

**Your Experiences**

**Please reflect back to your experiences in high school when answering the following questions:**

For this section, **bullying** is when someone **repeatedly** says mean or hurtful things to another individual. This includes teasing, hitting or fighting, threats, leaving you out on purpose, or telling lies or starting rumors about you.

6. **When you were in high school**, were you ever bullied?  
Yes No

**Cyberbullying** is defined as **repeatedly harassing** someone **using technology** such as email, instant messaging, social networking sites, blogs, other websites, cell phones, text messaging, picture messaging, video messaging, etc. with the intent of harming, embarrassing, or damaging the other individual. Cyberbullying also includes a person pretending to be someone they are not to embarrass, harass, or harm others.

**TEXT MESSAGING**

7. **When you were in high school**, did you ever receive harassing, mean, or nasty text-messages?  
Yes No

8. How many times did this occur?  
0  
1  
2 – 3  
4 – 7  
8 – 14  
15 or more

9. If yes to Question 7, who sent the harassing, mean, or nasty text messages to you? (Please check all that apply)

Ex-Boyfriend/Girlfriend  Friend/former friend  Classmate  
 Neighbor  Uncertain Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Not applicable

### INTERNET

10. **When you were in high school**, did you ever have someone create a website about you, use your pictures on-line without your permission, post damaging or embarrassing information about you, create forums about you, repeatedly send you harassing emails or instant messages, receive abusive chat room messages, etc?

Yes No

11. How many times did this occur?

0  
 1  
 2 – 3  
 4 – 7  
 8 – 14  
 15 or more

12. If yes to Question 10, who was doing it? (Please check all that apply)

Ex-Boyfriend/Girlfriend  Friend/former friend  Classmate  
 Neighbor  Uncertain Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Not applicable

### PICTURE/VIDEO PHONES

13. **When you were in high school**, did you ever have someone take embarrassing or degrading pictures or videos of you with picture/video phones without your permission and show the pictures/videos to others to embarrass you?

Yes No

14. How many times did this occur?

0  
 1  
 2 – 3  
 4 – 7  
 8 – 14  
 15 or more

15. If yes to Question 22, who was doing it? (Please check all that apply)

Ex-Boyfriend/Girlfriend  Friend/former friend  Classmate  
 Neighbor  Uncertain Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Not applicable

### PHONE CALLS

16. **When you were in high school**, were you ever repeatedly called on your mobile phone by a person/people not saying anything or leaving nasty/upsetting messages?

Yes No

17. How many times did this occur?

- 0
- 1
- 2 – 3
- 4 – 7
- 8 – 14
- 15 or more

18. If yes to Question 16, who was doing it? (Please check all that apply)

- Ex-Boyfriend/Girlfriend
- Friend/former friend
- Classmate
- Neighbor
- Uncertain Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_
- Not applicable

### MASQUERADING

19. **When you were in high school**, did you ever have someone pretend to be someone they were not and post or send material to damage your friendships or reputation, and/or hurt or embarrass you?

Yes No

20. How many times did this occur?

- 0
- 1
- 2 – 3
- 4 – 7
- 8 – 14
- 15 or more

21. If yes to Question 19, who was doing it? (Please check all that apply)

- Ex-Boyfriend/Girlfriend
- Friend/former friend
- Classmate
- Neighbor
- Uncertain Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_
- Not applicable

22. If you have encountered someone using the Internet or cellular phones pretending to be someone they were not, did they pretend to be you or someone else?

Me Someone else Both Not Applicable

### GENERAL CYBERBULLYING

23. **When you were in high school**, were you ever a victim of cyberbullying on social networking sites (example: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Myspace, etc.)?

Yes No

24. If you were cyberbullied on a social networking site, what sorts of comments/remarks were made? (Please check all that apply)

- Appearance
- Race
- Sexual Orientation
- Sexual Activity

- Intelligence
- Self-worth
- Religion
- Social status
- Other: Please describe.
- I have **never** been cyberbullied

25. If you were cyberbullied on a social networking site, what site was it (Please check all that apply)

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- Myspace
- SnapChat
- Vine
- Tumblr
- Other: please describe
- I have **never** been cyberbullied

26. If you were cyberbullied on a social networking site, was it done publicly for everyone to see (ex: posting something to someone's Facebook site) or privately (ex: through a private message)?

Public Private Not Applicable Both: please explain

27. If you were the victim of cyberbullying, what was the reason someone did this to you? (If you have never been a victim of cyberbullying, please select decline to answer)

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28. What do you think the motive was for someone to cyberbully you? (Please check all that apply):

- Jealousy
- Anger
- Revenge
- Just to be mean/hurtful
- To embarrass you
- Other: Please describe:
- I have **never** been cyberbullied.

### IMPACT/COPING

29. If you were the victim of cyberbullying on a social networking site, how did it impact you? (If you have never been a victim of cyberbullying, please select decline to answer)

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30. If you were a victim of cyberbullying on a social networking site, did you do any of the following things as a result of being cyberbullied? (Please select all that apply)

- Avoid friends/peers
- Tell someone what was happening (friends, family, trusted adult, etc.)
- Miss class
- Stop going to activities you once attended
- Lose interest in things

- Grades dropped in school
- Acted out behaviors (e.g. stealing, truancy, substance use, etc.)
- Drop-out of school
- Drink alcohol/use illegal drugs
- Get revenge
- Consciously avoid the Internet/cell phones
- Carry a weapon or something to defend yourself
- Other: Please describe:
- I have **never** been cyberbullied.

31. If you were a victim of cyberbullying on a social networking site, how did you cope with the experience? (If you have never been a victim of cyberbullying, please select decline to answer)

---

32. If you were a victim of cyberbullying on a social networking site, did you do any of the following things to cope? (Please select all that apply):

- Talk about the experience with a friend
- Talk about the experience with a parent or trusted adult
- Ignore it
- Stay off the Internet and/or your cell phone
- Remove personal information from certain websites (particularly social networking sites)
- Blocked certain people from contacting you on the Internet and/or your cell phone
- Confront the person doing it
- Ask the person doing it to stop
- Sent mean, harassing, or embarrassing information back
- Use physical force to convince the person to stop (beat them up)
- Contact the police
- Contact your service provider
- Change your phone number, email address, or other identifying information
- Other: Please describe:
- I have **never** been cyberbullied.

33. If you were a victim of cyberbullying on a social networking site, how did you get the harassment to stop? Please describe: (If you have never been a victim of cyberbullying, please select decline to answer.) \_\_\_\_\_

34. If you were a victim of cyberbullying on a social networking site, how have you been impacted? (If you have never been a victim of cyberbullying, please select decline to answer.)

- a. I felt sad or hurt  
1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day
- b. I felt angry  
1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day
- c. I felt embarrassed  
1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day
- d. I felt afraid  
1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day
- e. I felt anxious  
1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day
- f. I felt helpless and/or hopeless

- 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 g. I felt frustrated  
 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 h. I was stressed  
 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 f. I missed school because of it  
 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 g. I cried  
 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 h. I had difficulty concentrating  
 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 i. My grades have dropped because of it  
 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 j. I became jumpy or irritable  
 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 k. I thought about the online harassment almost constantly  
 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 i. I stopped doing activities I once enjoyed  
 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 j. I acted out  
 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 k. I blamed myself  
 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 l. I felt lonely  
 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 m. I felt depressed  
 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 n. I felt ashamed  
 1-Never 2-Once/twice 3-A few times 4-Many times 5-Almost every day  
 o. I had thoughts of suicide  
 1-No 2-Yes, without a plan 3-Yes, with a plan 4-Yes, with an attempt