

ABSTRACT

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STICKS 'N STONES: BULLYING IN A DIGITAL WORLD
EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF CYBERBULLYING AMONG
AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Bullying has been a social issue for decades, however, increased media attention to recent cases of teen homicide-suicides have made it a current hot topic. This study examines bullying, more specifically, cyberbullying among American high school students and its prevalence on depression and suicide. The popularity of the internet and other social media outlets puts our teens at risk as cyberbullying increases, so does depression and suicide among today's youth. By forming partnerships with schools and communities to develop comprehensive intervention and prevention programs, social work practitioners can educate parents, school administrators, and the general public about cyberbullying to increase responsiveness and reduce bystander bullying (Young, 2012). A reduction in the occurrence of cyberbullying may prevent depression and suicide among teen students. Through information presented in this study there is a possibility that lives could be saved.

STICKS 'N STONES: BULLYING IN A DIGITAL WORLD
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AMONG AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Research shows that one hundred and sixty thousand American school-aged children are absent from school daily due to being bullied. These students represent a growing number of bullying victims who choose to skip school rather than face their bullies (Vail, 1999). Studies reveal that one-third of adolescents stated they have been a perpetrator or victim of bullying (DoSomething.org, 2014). Why this increase in bullying? Social media outlets such as Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, and Instagram have invaded our teenage culture. Some teenagers use pictures and/or aggressive and threatening language toward other internet users without having to speak one word. They allow the emoji and hashtag to speak for them. Used as a new trend in bullying, technology offers our youth a secret path to bully their peers, while remaining hidden in plain view. Cyberbullying is bullying that uses electronic technology such as cellular phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat rooms, and websites (Stopbullying.gov). Notably, cyberbullying is on the rise at an alarming rate and perpetrators are using the same tools that were designed to build bonds to wreak havoc on others (Lieberman & Cowan, 2011). It is

reported that seventy percent of students who execute heinous school violence were once victims or bully-victims, as in the cases of Adam P. Lanza (Sandy Hook Elementary School shooter) and Eric D. Harris (Columbine High School shooter) (Center for Health and Healthcare in School [CHHCS], 2004). Not to mention, bully-victims are more likely to commit suicide as in the aforementioned cases of Lanza and Harris (Espelage & Holt, 2013). As former bully-victims themselves, it is believed that bullying and depression were contributing factors that led these young men to kill so many teachers and classmates before ending their own lives (Greene & Ross, 2005). Chapter I will explore the effects of cyberbullying on depression and suicide among American high school students. The objective of this chapter is to present a clear statement of the research, the purpose of this research, and the significance as it pertains to depression and suicide.

Statement of the Study Issue

In today's culture, bullying consists of "...physical bullying, emotional bullying, cyberbullying, and sexting, circulating suggestive or nude photos or messages about a person" (BullyingStatistics.org, 2014, p. 2). In fact, with each click of the mouse, cyberbullying potentially grows more rampant among our youth, especially those in American high schools. The internet and mass media circulation enable our society to participate and spectate while our youth act as perpetrators and prey to various forms of bullying. Klomek (2011) believes cyberbullying, a criminal behavior, has become a societal issue due to suicide cases such as Phoebe Prince and Megan Meier. Prince was a fifteen year old Massachusetts teenager who hung herself after being teased and tormented by fellow schoolmates over a boy. The teenagers bullied Prince nonstop for

three months by taunting her in school and posting nasty messages on Facebook. Finally, after being bullied all day at school, Prince went home and hung herself with a scarf. Prince's last message to her mother simply read "I can't take much more..." (Newsvine, 2010). Seven females and two males were arrested and convicted for criminal harassment against Prince. Although the sexual contact was assenting, the young men were convicted of statutory rape because Prince was fifteen and a minor. Prince's case led Massachusetts to enact stricter anti-bullying legislation (Newsvine, 2010). In the same way, Megan Meier was a thirteen year old Missouri girl who also committed suicide by hanging after being tormented by a fictional MySpace person named *Josh Evans* (Newsvine, 2010). Shamefully, unlike Prince's teen perpetrators, Meier's bully was an adult, the mother of a disgruntled friend. In honor of her memory, Missouri lawmakers created the HR 1966 Bill, the Megan Meier Cyberbullying Prevention Act. This act prohibits the transmission of messages designed to "coerce, intimidate, harass, or cause substantial emotional distress to another person" (Newsvine, 2010, "School Bullying and Cyberbullying Suicide Connection," para. 3). These cases are only two of the many cases of teenage suicide where bullying was a factor.

Research on bullying behavior is essential because school-aged children between twelve and eighteen are increasingly becoming victims of cyberbullying. Statistics indicate that seven percent of students in grades six to twelve experience cyberbullying (Cohn & Canter, 2013). Klomek (2011) found in order to escape the pressures of bullying, more high school students are choosing suicide. In the discussion of how to help our children and save their lives, the correlation between cyberbullying, depression and suicide must be examined in order to combat the negative and often deadly outcomes of

bullying. Once studies can show a link between these three, effective methods of prevention and interventions of bullying can be created to help diminish and possibly eliminate bullying victimization.

Purpose of the Study

The objective of this conceptual paper is to define bullying; more specifically, cyberbullying, and to determine the correlation between bullying, depression and suicide among American school students, ages twelve to eighteen years old. This is an ideal age bracket to examine because research studies show that in today's society, bullying is most common among this age group (Klomek et al., 2011). Comparatively, data shows that fifteen percent of high school students, grades nine to twelve were victims of cyberbullying (BullyingStatistics.org, 2013). Cohn and Canter (2013) indicate that fifteen to thirty percent of adolescents will either be a victim or bully while attending school. This research further states that many student victims of bullying feel isolated and have no one to confide in (Cohn & Canter, 2013). Experiencing depression, many victims remain silent and suffer alone, never getting the proper mental, emotional, and sometimes physical assistance they need. Feeling hopeless and seeing no way out, many student victims of bullying tragically end their lives (Cohn & Canter, 2013). Research documents that more than 4,500 suicidal deaths occur annually among American school-aged students (BullyingStatistics.org, 2013). The bully and bullied are at greater danger for suicide and bully-victims are the greatest sufferers (Kim & Leventhal, 2008). For these reasons, this paper will examine the factors that make a person more susceptible to

cyberbullying, the indicators and the effects of cyberbullying, and how these cause depression and suicide among American high school students.

Significance of the Study

This research recognizes the importance of combating cyberbullying as students are increasingly using technology to victimize their targets. Because cyberbullying happens outside the classroom and away from adult supervision, the methods students use to carry out these anti-social behaviors warrant dedicated researching. Social work implications suggest that as more people understand cyberbullying and can identify its predictors and symptoms then more teenagers, perpetrators and victims alike, can get the help and support they need to live healthy, productive lives (Young, 2012). This research can instruct social work practitioners on how to develop direct social work practices to assist victims, bullies, and their families by forming partnerships with schools and communities to develop interventions and prevention programs. Educating parents, school administrators, and the general public about cyberbullying and its prevalence on depression and suicide can increase responsiveness and reduce bystander bullying (Young, 2012). A reduction in the occurrence of cyberbullying may prevent depression and suicide among teen students. This research has the potential to save lives. Our children are our future. If this expression is true, then parents, school administrators and communities must work on all levels, micro, mezzo, and macro to combat against bullying. It will take a village to raise and empower future generations against bullying.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The goal of the literature review is to provide an overview of the research topic. Chapter II will include research that defines bullying, how to recognize it, and a historical perspective on bullying. This chapter will also examine the Afrocentric Perspective and Theoretical Frameworks: General Systems Theory and Social Learning Theory.

Historical Perspective

Research on bullying dates back to 1970 when Dr. Dan Olweus a Swedish research professor developed the first recognized scientific study on bullying. His research was published as a book, *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys* (Olweus, 1978). This book first printed in Scandinavia in 1973 and was made available in the United States in 1978 (Conn, 2004). Dr. Olweus' early research concentrated on the behavior of individual students and confronted the common belief that bullying was a part of *growing up*. Later, in 1982, Dr. Olweus began to study the consequences of bullying after three fourteen year old boys committed suicide after being bullied (Olweus, 1993). His research on school bullying became the groundbreaking development of an intervention plan called *Bullying Prevention Program* which is modeled around the

world (Walton, 2005). Dr. Olweus' research, intervention, and prevention programs have been instrumental in how our society views bullying behaviors and its victimization. Inasmuch as Dr. Olweus' programs opened the door to recognition and discussions of bullying, a drawback to his work was the exclusion of relational bullying and cyberbullying.

As studies on bullying continue, the definition of bullying constantly evolves, therefore, a universal definition for bullying has yet to be determined. Olweus (1993) provided the foundational definition of bullying as, "When one person picks on, harasses, or pesters another" (p. 8). Dr. Olweus is recognized for creating a definition for bullying that all other definitions would be built upon. As research on bullying expands, so does the definition to include all types of bullying behavior. In order to assist researchers to measure and lawmakers to legislate, a universal definition of bullying is needed (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006).

According to the website StopBullying.gov (2014), bullying can be defined as unwelcome, violent, and hostile actions of a student, often involving actual or apparent influence or control over another student (StopBullying.gov, 2014). Black, Weinles, and Washington (2010) describe bullying as "a chronic abuse of power where the oppressor uses physical, verbal, social, or emotional aggression to intentionally and repeatedly hurt another person. Bullying consists of three elements; aggressive behavior, power inequality, and repetitious actions" (p. 138). Sutton, Smith, and Swettenham (1999) propose a bully's intentions are to repeatedly harass and cause bodily and/or mental anguish on their victim. The actions can include such behaviors as an uninvited contact (striking and hitting), vocal (bantering and jeering), and vandalizing or theft of property.

A bully's primary goal is to cause bodily, emotional, and mental damage to his victim(s) (Sutton et al., 1999).

As school violence increased and a correlation between bullying, depression, and suicide was detected, research on bullying surged as a result of the 1999 Columbine High School murder-suicide killings by two friends, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebod. On April 20, 1999, these two twelfth grade students entered their Colorado high school wearing black trench coats to conceal the military style guns and ammunition they had strapped to their bodies. They shot and killed thirteen people and wounded twenty before turning the guns on themselves (Cook, 2010). Harris and Klebod reportedly were bullied most of their high school years and suffered from depression. Over the next decade America would experience more school shooting violence in which bullying was a direct or indirect factor. Since 2000 to 2010 some six hundred empirical research studies related to bullying have been identified (Cook, 2010). Perhaps lawmakers, school administrators, and parents alike needed to determine the cause of school violence committed by teens, prompting further bullying studies. While some of the research was challenged, America was able to join the European nations in methodical examinations of bully behaviors among adolescents (Nansel et al., 2001).

Research tells us that when children start school, so does the bullying. As evidenced by research, most children will experience or know someone who has experienced bullying (Coyle, 2009). A survey on elementary school bullying details that elementary school children were bully-victims at a rate of twenty-five percent, while fifteen percent were described as repeat aggressors (Borg, 1999). Likewise, as elementary school children age and mature, and parental impact begins to wane, these school

children no longer quietly standby, but become potential peer advocates to those being bullied (Coyle, 2009). Bullying occurs more often when school children reach age twelve and are in grades four through six. Pelligrini, Bartini, and Brooks (1999) stated, "... early adolescents witness an increase in aggression while youngsters look for new friendships, for as soon as peer groups are formed, many of the aggressive behaviors subside" (p. 65). In time, middle school children discover that bullying looks different than in elementary school. Reports show that while in middle school eighty percent of students engaged in some anti-social behavior, with males partaking in physical and vocal harassment and females preferring social or relational harassment which involves hurting someone's status or associations within a certain group (Frisen, Jonsson, & Persson, 2007). A decline in bullying is observed as students matriculate to high school. The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools (CHHCS, 2004) confirms that twenty to thirty high school students repeatedly participated in some form of anti-social behavior, acting as the bully or bully-victim. This same report concluded that students felt bullying negatively impacted their physical, social, and academic well-being. Hence, the victims' well-being must be considered since cyberbullying can occur in the presence or absence of guardians or school administrators. With internet violence growing, we can no longer reason that our youth are safe at school or at home.

Even though numerous intervention programs have been developed and are used in our educational systems, bullying remains a concern among today's teenagers, parents, and school administrators. DoSomething.org (2014) suggests that bullying has evolved since the playground days of shoving, name calling, and taking someone's lunch. Obviously, bullying is no longer a schoolyard problem. Browse any high schooler's

email, Instagram or Facebook pages and you may find postings from a target, victim, or bully (Cohn & Canter, 2013). Students give varied reasons for the bullying, including to be cool, to be recognized, or to be inducted into a gang (DoSomething.org, 2014).

Bullying affects more than seventy percent of students as evidenced by Canter (2005), who reports that students can be characterized as a bully (perpetrator), the victim, target, or bystander, or a combination of these. For this study, it is necessary to clarify keywords sometimes associated with bullying, such as victim, bully, target, bully-victim, bystander, and cyberbullying. A person or group (mob) who persistently inflicts injury on those seemingly weaker or more vulnerable is labeled a bully or perpetrator (Swearer et al., 2010). The person to whom the bullying is aimed at is referred to as the target. The person who finds himself powerless and defenseless to combat the behaviors of bullying is called the victim (Coloroso, 2003). The difference between a target and victim is that the former is unharmed by the threats aimed at him. A person who is or was a bully and victim is called a bully-victim (Coloroso, 2003). A bully-victim could be a teen who is bullied and then bullies his peers. The individual who observes the bullying is known as a bystander (Coloroso, 2003). The bystander's decision to advocate for the victim, partner with the bully, inform the authorities, interject, or take no interest can significantly impact the consequences of the victimization (Swearer et al., 2010). Why do youth bully? Research does not offer a single cause of bullying but shows numerous influences that may put a young person at risk for bullying. According to the website, www.BullyStatistics.org (2013), elements such as a child's family, peers, school environment, and community influences are all risks factors for bullying.

Recently, a new variation of bullying has surfaced, becoming even more problematic than the traditional in-person bullying. Often done anonymously, cyberbullying is the electronic posting of mean-spirited messages and embarrassing pictures about a person on social media (Brent, 2003). StopBullying.gov (2014) reports that nearly fifty percent of students have been bullied via social media. This same research shows that more than seventy percent of students acknowledge viewing some type of cyberbullying through pictures and/or written words (StopBullying.gov, 2014). Why is cyberbullying so popular among our youth? Students have access to electronic technology both in the classroom and at home, via computers, the internet, and cellular phones. More than eighty percent of high school students have access to and use cellular phones daily making cellular phone access the most common use of cyberbullying among teenaged students (Bauman, 2013). Technology is useful for promoting education, but when unsupervised, students can use it to harm and terrorize others. Students cited cyberbullying more destructive than bigotry, teen sex, and drug consumption (Bauman et al., 2013). Further research reveals that fifty-eight percent of students stated that someone had written cruel and insensitive comments about them via email, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, or other various social media outlets (StopBullying.gov, 2014). Equally alarming, fifty-three percent of students reported that they had utilized these same social media outlets to comment negatively toward another student (Bauman et al., 2013). Teenagers also admit cyberbullying as problematic and recognize the damaging impact it has on its victims. Sadly, teenagers do not seem to understand the ramifications of cyberbullying, as more than eighty percent consider it easier to commit and conceal than traditional, in-person bullying (StopBullying.gov, 2014). Sutton (1999)

found that a person becomes a repeat offender of a crime when they can escape its due punishment. The impact of this concept is that students who cyberbully potentially could become repeat offenders of this crime, escaping any legal punishment, while the intensity and cruelty of their actions increase as the occasion perpetuates (DoSomething.org, 2014). It is probable that bullies and bully-victims may become involved in more severe criminal behavior.

Cyberbullying and Depression

During the 2007 and 2008 school year, research data reveals bullying among thirty-two percent of American students, ages twelve to eighteen years old. The report concluded that among teenage students, twenty-one percent were bullied at least twice a month, ten percent were bullied twice a week, seven percent were bullied daily and nine percent of the victims sustained physical injuries. Additionally, Wang (2010) reports thirteen percent of sixth to tenth graders reported being cyberbullied. A mammoth dilemma in today's society, more youth are using cyberbullying to victimize those less powerful than them (Hinduja, 2010). A social media phenome, Facebook, not only introduced us to a world unknown, it also presented new methods in which students could bully. Recently, adolescents and adults alike are flocking towards the latest social media craze, Snapchat. This popular mobile app allows users to post images and live videos that self-destruct after ten seconds of being viewed, making postings undetectable and user history untraceable (Matney, 2015). Not surprising, since postings cannot be traced to the user, our youth are now using Snapchat at an alarming rate to bully. In November 2015, Snapchat reported six billion pictures and videos were sent by its users. Meanwhile, they

indicated seven billion daily video views for the first business quarter of 2016 (Lunden, 2016). Snapchat may seem like the perfect social media advancement as users do not have to worry about embarrassing moments being accidentally posted and constantly lurking in their browser history, but for irresponsible users, Snapchat can be a weapon.

A major psychiatric dysfunction in teen suicidal behavior is depression. Predictors in suicidal depressed teens consist of mood and anxiety disorders, substance use and abuse, and conduct disorder and impulsivity, known as disruptive behaviors. Young (2012) advises that victims of bullying may show signs of depression and sadness, waning school performance, increased absences from class, diminished contact with schoolmates or eluding school and public settings altogether. Bullying and depression are connected as depression can emotionally impact both victims and bullies, although victims of cyberbullying may have a greater threat of suffering from depression than those who bully. Research studies are beginning to show the impact bullying has on the mental health of both the victims and perpetrators. Coyl (2009) found that “those who are bullied report higher levels of anxiety, depression, and lower self-esteem into adulthood and childhood bullies are more likely to engage in criminal behavior” (p. 406). Hinduja (2010) reports students who were cyberbullied are more depressed than those involved in face to face altercations. Such outcomes may be due to the physical distance and anonymity of the cyberbully, the 24/7 access the bully has to the target and/or victim, and the ambiguity of the threats and harassment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

Cyberbullying may be more damaging to adolescents because: (1) perpetrators can be faceless, (2) perpetrators can have 24/7 access to their targets and/or victims via computers and cellular phones, (3) due to the physical distance, social media can be more

callous, dispassionate, and merciless and (4) victims feel hopeless in reporting the bullying as they may lack physical evidence and they regard their parents and adults as out of touch to understand or unable to help them (Hinduja, 2009).

Although depression among adolescents is not fully established, there seems to be an existing correlation between depression and bullying. Cyberbullying can impede vital communal relationships that are created to sustain a teen's psychological and social welfare as evidenced by Erik Erikson's stages of psychological development (Brent, 2003). Erikson believed that the adolescence stage, age twelve to eighteen is the identity versus role confusion. To explain, adolescents cultivate a sense of self and personal identity. In doing so they are able to stay true to self, if they fail they will have role confusion and lack a strong sense of self. When teens have a weak sense of self they become vulnerable to bullying and may have a greater threat of suffering depression (Brent, 2003).

Similarly, victims of bullying can have increased biopsychosocial side effects such as migraines, nausea, upset stomach, and experience depression and isolation. Victims of cyberbullying described experiencing isolation, absenteeism from school/truancy, low self-assurance and suicidal thoughts (Swearer et al., 2009). Other warning signs of depression in adolescent bullies and bully-victims are: (1) extensive periods of unhappiness or persistent crying or surges of rage, (2) decreased appetite, (3) low to no energy, and (4) noticeable mood swings (Brent, 2003).

Brent (2003) also suggests that aside from apparent physical injuries of bullying, there are other ways the victim is disparaged. Some victims may endure severe, long-term issues as bullying may impact psychological and emotional health, lead to substance

use and abuse, criminal behavior, and suicide (StopBullying.gov, 2014). Also, bullying abuse may increase school truancy while decreasing educational interest and skills. Subsequently, once an adult, a victim's lack of schooling could reduce him to marginalized socioeconomics, and/or lower earned wages. Likewise, cyberbullying victims may later suffer major depressive disorder disease when they reach adulthood (Swearer et al., 2009).

Parents, school administrators, and families have to be aware of cautionary symptoms of unhappiness and despondency among youngsters. According to Springs (2007), teens who commit suicide frequently suffer from depression and while research is not yet conclusive to the exact correlation between bullying and suicide, depression might be the bridge that closes the research gap.

Cyberbullying and Suicide

Mokeyane (2014) proposes that cyberbullying has been marginalized because of the widespread availability and usage of social media in today's culture. Many students, parents, and adults consider bullying as "kid's play" yet, bullying is a grave problem (Young, 2012). When adults reason that bullying is a phase of life for children, it misguides our youth into believing that nothing is wrong with bullying, that it is harmless play, and certainly not a criminal act. Additionally, adults who hold this belief may not recognize the subtle changes in students who are targets, victims or bullies (Springs, 2007). As a result, this lackadaisical disposition may cause some adults to become blind to the need to thoroughly investigate the interactions between teens by asking questions, intervening, and then serve as mediators.

Reports show that American adolescents, ages fifteen to nineteen, die mainly from accidents, homicides, and suicides. Moreover, suicide ranks as the third leading cause of death among fifteen to twenty-four year olds (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], 2011). Research documents that more than 4,500 suicidal deaths occur annually among American high school students (BullyingStatistics.org, 2013). Although suicidality has declined between 1990 through 2003, there was an increase during the span of 2003 to 2004: females ages, ten to nineteen years old, and males ages, fifteen to nineteen years old (CDC, 2007). Sadly, suicide touches all youth, but some are in greater danger than others, such as males die from suicide more frequently than females. The NIMH (2011) conducted a survey on suicide deaths among ten through twenty-four year olds that revealed: male deaths, eighty-three percent and females, seventeen percent; however, suicide attempts were higher in females than males.

Ethnicity was also measured, showing that Native Indians, Alaskans, and Latino adolescents had more incidences of suicide than other ethnicities. Also, among American high school students, attempted suicide rates for Latinos were higher than African Americans, Caucasians, and other ethnic groups (NIMH, 2011). This same report identified the preferred method of suicide among youngsters was suffocation while teenagers and young adults turned to guns (NIMH, 2011).

Another national survey revealed that more teens survive than die from suicidal attempts. American school-aged teens in grades nine to twelve were surveyed and the results showed that fifteen percent of the students had suicidal ideations, eleven percent described having a strategy, and seven percent attempted suicide (CDC, 2010). Annually,

emergency departments treat more than 149,000 young people, ages ten to twenty for self-inflicted wounds as a result of attempted suicide (Brent, 2003).

What causes suicidality in adolescents? It is a false assumption that people who commit suicide do so without any early predictors. The National Health Care for the Homeless Council (NHCHC, 2011) indicates that victims offer several forewarnings before committing the act, such as they may reference death in general or talk about dying. The NIMH (2011) list these behaviors as predictors to consider when determining if a teen is contemplating suicide: (1) comments of *leaving*, (2) expressing feelings of hopelessness, (3) avoiding family and friends, and (4) decreased appetite and low energy. These warning signs may not indicate that the teen is suicidal, but should be an alarm to dialogue with and monitor the teen.

The association among bullying maltreatment and dejection is not restricted to in-person bullying, but the Cyberbullying Research Center believes that cyberbullying victims may also have little self-regard and ideas of suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Social and mass media allow more people to join in on the bullying (BullyingStatistics.org, 2014). The more people involved, leads to added increase of shame and harm, which results in more student victims having suicidal ideations with plans to end their life. Joiner and Ribeiro (2011) conclude that suicidal ideations arise from the dual perception students may have of being withdrawn and burdensome. This perception is known as the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicidal behavior. This concept, when applied to cyberbullying cases that have ended in teen suicide, may be the connective explanation of how teens feel before committing suicide. Is it possible that victims of bullying may see themselves as a burden to their family and society at large?

With this in mind, some research studies show the correlation between bullying and suicide is that those youth who commit suicide as a result of bullying displayed signs of severe suicide risk factors such as mental health issues, substance use and/or abuse, family history of suicide, or an earlier suicide attempt. Therefore teachers and social workers must remain aware of the past suicidal history of a student being bullied, as the exposures to bullying may make the student more vulnerable and inclined to take their life (Underwood, Springer, & Scott, 2011).

Afrocentric Perspective

To expand our comprehension of the human condition as it relates to surviving and prevailing, the Afrocentric Perspective in social work practice is used to emphasize the survival patterns of African Americans and other individuals of African descent in the Diaspora (Mitchell, Ward, & Waymer, 2000). According to Schiele (2009), Afrocentricity is the study of African customs among African Americans and America's reaction to their pursuit of liberty and egalitarianism. Afrocentricity allows African Americans to understand the importance of their ancestral lineage and develop a greater sense of self-awareness.

The Afrocentric Perspective is a theoretical concept established on the philosophical beliefs of traditional Africa and contemporary African Americans (Schiele, 1996). This perspective has at its core, three concepts. First, in the arena of social work, Afrocentricity promotes an alternative to the European viewpoint (Asante, 1988). The Afrocentric Perspective centers around African descendants unlike the current paradigm of Eurocentric ideology that focuses on people of European descent (Asante, 1990).

Afrocentricity is a way of having “Black perspectives” as opposed to “White perspectives” (Schiele, 2009). Secondly, Afrocentricity disproves the negative misrepresentations that our society has toward non-Whites, especially African Americans (Asante, 1988). According to Asante (1990), the Afrocentric Perspective exists to affirm descendants of African heritage to be active, key architects of their own history. Furthermore, contrary to belief, the Afrocentric Perspective is not only concerned about the progression of human rights, social economics justice, and empowerment for people of African descent alone but for all groups and members within the human family (Shiele, 1994). Afrocentricity encourages a universal vision that is inclusive of all races (Asante, 1988). Borum (2007) believes that the Afrocentric Perspective supports a humanistic approach to living which regards human mankind with no prejudice to race, creed, religious beliefs or sexuality. Lastly, Schiele (1996) considers that Afrocentricity allows ethnic and cultural groups to exist in a communal awareness of each other, not focusing only on what makes them different, but accepting and appreciating the differences.

Afrocentricity has several values that could help facilitate treatment development when working with victims and bullies, such as Interconnectedness and Thought and Practice (Battle, 2007). Interconnectedness understands that people and systems, though complex, are linked to one another and function as one. The idea of interconnection originated from an African word, ubuntu, translated "human-ness" (Battle, 2007). Ubuntu is sometimes interpreted as humanity towards others (Battle, 2007). Philosophically speaking, Ubuntu would be the sense of common bonding that joins humanity universally. Likewise, Ubuntu is entwined in the focal point of Afrocentricity, “I am

and because we are, therefore, I am” (Asante, 2009, p. 36). More specifically, what occurs in one area, can and does affect the greater part.

The Afrocentric Perspective can benefit targets, victims, bullies, and victim-bullies. By promoting interconnection, those who bully may realize when they lash out and bully, they are in all actuality, harming themselves (Asante, 2009). The Afrocentric Perspective can also inspire the bully to stop bullying by implementing the Thought and Practice Principle. This is the theory of being cognizant of social inequality and taking the necessary actions to generate progressive change (Schiele, 1996; Sherr, 2006). Simply stated, it is being aware of social inequalities and acting responsibly to bring about positive transformation for the greater good of society (Schriver, 2011). Bullying practices can be reduced and eventually eradicated by obtaining knowledge on the impact and causal effects of bullying (Modupe, 2006). Education on bullying and suicide can promote awareness and propel this societal issue to the forefront of our concerns. By applying the Afrocentric Perspective, students, parents, and adults will have to recognize the information available on bullying, depression, and suicide, and begin taking responsibility and actions in prevention, intervention, and cessation of bullying (Asante, 1980).

The Afrocentric Perspective gives the social worker the opportunity to utilize a perspective that is seldom recognized or applied in the mainstream sector of the social work profession (Schiele, 1996). It is an obligation of the social work practitioner to give support and advocate for individuals, groups, and communities that are oppressed and need empowering on all levels of social work practice (Schriver, 2011). The NASW code of ethics believes practitioners are to be culturally competent (National Association of

Social Work [NASW], 2008). In other words, practitioners should have fluency with cultures different from their own. Although Afrocentricity was born out of the African culture, it can still be useful in all cultures (Sherr, 2006). The idea of Afrocentricity is not to segregate, but to integrate the African Perspective into today's Eurocentric culture (Schiele, 1996). In the same way, bullying of any type should not be applauded or tolerated within our society, for it only separates and alienates its victims. The Afrocentric Perspective will allow the majority to look through the lens of the minority and consider the issues of bullying and its occurrence on depression and suicide that are not only prevalent in the African American community, but in Hispanic, Asian, and White American communities at large (Sherr, 2006). Social workers are encouraged to apply the Afrocentric Perspective when working with clients because it can eliminate oppression and spiritual estrangement among ethnic and cultural groups (Schriver, 2011). In social work practice, Afrocentricity is significant because it motivates social work practitioners to advocate for equality and justice rather than focus only on direct social work practice (Schiele, 1996). Social work practitioners who utilize the Afrocentric Perspective in social work practice seek to create conditions favorable for societal change, healing, and community solidarity (Foster, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

This chapter will review theoretical frameworks that are utilized to understand and address bullying. The two social work theories to be reviewed are the General Systems Theory and Social Learning Theory frameworks. The General Systems Theory is a subcategory of systems models which concentrate largely on families and

organizations. Baker (1999) states, “general systems theory is a conceptual orientation that attempts to explain holistically the behavior of people and societies by identifying the interacting components of the system and the controls that keep these components (subsystems) stable and in a state of equilibrium” (p. 191). Used as a criterion, this definition explains how bullying affects all levels of the social-ecological system in which students find themselves (Hoover et al., 1992). For example, on the individual, or micro level, studies reveal those who are victimized tend to suppress and internalize problems (Mokeyane, 2013). Likewise, on the family, or mezzo level, a student who is mistreated or abused at home or lives in an unstable environment may fall prey to bullying either by victimization or perpetration (Swearer et al., 2009). Furthermore, on the community, or macro level, school systems that have little supervision and constant conflict are breeding grounds for bullying (Swearer et al., 2009). Similarly, at the macro level, governing policies that are discriminatory and exclude rather than include may propagate the notion for bullying among students of different races and socio-economic backgrounds (Swearer et al., 2009). Considered a severe practice of school violence, bullying harms not only victims and perpetrators, but our schools, organizations, and the world at large. Swearer (2009) warns bullying rarely occurs in seclusion but is a multifaceted collaboration amid the bully and the bullied. To make it undesirable and unwelcomed in our society, bullying necessitates responsiveness on all socio-ecological levels (Swearer et al., 2009).

A second framework to consider when discussing bullying is the Social Learning Theory. This theory is based on the behaviors and unlawful actions that cultivate through exchanges and practices within a person’s social environment (Sutton & Swettenham,

1999). The Social Learning Theory (SLT) was introduced by one of social psychology's foremost thinkers on social behavior, Albert Bandura. Founded from studies conducted in the 1960's, Bandura explained how by studying and observing others, people acquire new actions, beliefs, and outlooks (Bandura, 1986). For example, a teenager might learn how to bully by witnessing other bullies bully. The SLT proposes that people observe, remember, and imitate behaviors they see. Interestingly, sociologists have studied aggression and criminal behavior using social learning behavior (Bandura, 1986). Bandura believed that social behavior, any type of behavior that we exhibit socially, is learned largely by watching and mimicking the behaviors of others. According to the SLT, behavior is also influenced by rewards and/or punishments (Bandura, 1986). For instance, in the case of bullying, students may see a bully be punished with in-school detention and recognize that bullying and anti-social behaviors warrant punishment.

The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP, 2011) reports cyberbullying is rapidly emerging as a societal issue that requires our attention. Just as cyberbullies use social media to victimize, social media can be employed to encourage awareness through understanding, education, and constructive communal conduct. Promoting empathy to include accountability for a bully's anti-social behavior and educating the masses of the perils of bullying are key steps towards intervention (AACAP.org, 2011). Some outcomes of these interventions might comprise a decline in bullying incidents, motivate victims to file police reports, and challenge mass media to construct methods to combat bullying. Moreover, social media outlets could create anti-bullying advertisements, such as "pop-ups" to be marketed on their web pages (Swearer et al., 2009). Awareness could be increased if a celebrity spokesperson could be used to

speak up and out against bullying. Television ads and commercials could be used to draw the attention of students, parents, and adults. The AACAP.org (2011) recommends that parents promote healthy social media practices for their children by monitoring their social media accounts, teaching online etiquette and regularly discussing their child's media usage. Parents must monitor and ascertain that their children participate in physically as well as intellectually motivating endeavors that encourage biological, psychological, and emotional well-being (Mokeyane, 2013). Parents must dialogue with their children to ensure that they understand the right usages and abuses of social media.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of Chapter III is to explain the methodology used to perform the study. The methodology chapter is necessary as it offers a comprehensive explanation of the techniques used to conduct the research. This chapter will identify the specific approaches applied to gather data and discuss the limitations of the study.

Methods of the Study

According to Petticrew (2006), a systematic review provides extensive research studies that are organized and arranged on a specific topic. Therefore, this study utilized a systematic review to search, evaluate, and synthesize the results of the conceptual study. For this research, a systematic review produced the most findings on the effects of cyberbullying on the prevalence of depression and suicide among American high school students, ages twelve to eighteen. By using a systematic review, data already collected and referenced reduces the need for duplicate research to be executed or individual trials to be conducted. Fundamentally, utilizing a systematic review saves time and is a proficient form of researching (Petticrew, 2006). A vital component of this research was to gather data on earlier readings that would help direct the research inquiry. A vital component of this research was to gather data on earlier readings that would help direct the research inquiry. In order to achieve the objective, an examination of existing

studies was achieved by accessing hundreds of study resources made available via Clark Atlanta University's Robert W. Woodruff Library. Several databases were employed, such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, GALILEO, Psychology Journals, and Academic Search Complete. To retrieve data, keywords including Teen Bullying, Teen Suicide, Consequences and/or Effects of Bullying, Suicide and Bullying, Suicide and Depression, Cyberbullying, Online Violence, and Juvenile Bullying were used. This search yielded numerous related sources to be used, but after examination, approximately forty-five references were utilized to conduct the study. Included in the references were peer-reviewed journal articles from online sociology and criminology journals, articles from six reliable websites, and one documentary.

The data utilized had to meet specific requirements to be considered for this research. The data had to be scholarly, reputable, and easily accessible. The primary goal of this conceptual study was an analysis of cyberbullying, depression, and suicide. In addition, studies needed to include an examination of the effects of cyberbullying on depression and suicide among American students. Furthermore, the research had to include students, ages twelve to eighteen years old, currently in school.

Exclusion criteria for this conceptual study consist of articles that included data on adults and suicide. Similarly, other studies that explored youth violence such as vandalism, truancy, drug use, and antisocial behavior were omitted from the review.

Limitations of the Study

While constructing this conceptual paper there were some limitations posed by the research. For instance, there was a lack of evidence-based research that clearly examined the key sources of bullying and suicide among high school students. Since

bullying is often times not reported, there were limited case studies or persons to provide preliminary research data. As a result, data collected from other researchers' studies had to be referenced. Subsequently, the researcher is restricted to the limitations experienced by the previous researcher's body of work. Likewise, access was another limitation noted. Since researchers do not have access to every article of research conducted, research is limited to what can be accessed, retrieved, and included in the data gathering. Another limitation to be identified is suicide itself. Seeing how some victims of bullying do commit suicide, their stories and experiences go untold. The lack of data from these key contributors, the victims, hinders the effects of bullying to be completely known.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of cyberbullying and its prevalence on depression and suicide. This chapter gathers information in order to display the impact that cyberbullying has among American high school students.

Findings on Cyberbullying and Depression

Some high school students who had been bullied reported that they were not adversely harmed according to research studies conducted by Hinduja and Patchin (2007). Whereas some other students recounted experiencing psychological distress. Schneider (2012) reports that thirty-three percent of cybervictims experienced some form of psychological distress as opposed to traditional bullying victims, twenty-six percent. Not surprising, cybervictims were more nervous and anxious in comparison to victims of traditional, in-person bullying. In a report by Ybarra and Mitchell (2004), victims of cyberbullying and traditional bullying had comparable outcomes, such as a low sense of worth, anxiety, depression, performing poorly at school, and elevated stress levels. Hinduja and Patchin (2007) believe that there are many distinctive properties to cyberbullying that may contribute to the psychological distress. These properties might include the convenience of sending text messages, the perpetuity of electronic messages,

the anonymity that technology affords the bully, and the technological ubiquity, taking place anywhere, any moment. According to Ybarra and Mitchell (2004a) cyberbullying not only happens within the walls and halls of schools, but mostly happens outside the classroom and away from campus, causing victims to feel captive even when not at school. Willard (2007) discovered that students resorted to deleting their social media accounts or would suspend online usage for a period of time to escape the anguish of online bullying. Ybarra (2004a) discovered cyberbullying to be further detrimental on students than face to face harassment.

There are several approaches to combat cyberbullying. Possibly, the actions of the aggressor need to be termed what they are rather than use the general word, *bullying*, to explain this anti-social behavior. Since a universal definition for bullying has yet to be determined, various delineations are used among educators, administrators, and parents to describe bullying. Similarly, students have a different perception and description of bullying (Boulton et al., 2002). Perhaps the word bullying is too wide-ranging and overused. A more detailed word to define the action would be to call the action, harassment. In 2011, the US government released its findings on bullying in *Analysis of State Bullying Laws and Policies* (US Department of Education, 2011). They identified forty-six states that had anti-bullying laws, while three states were unable to outline the conduct which made bullying illegal. As a result, schools in those three states were left to interpret for themselves how and when to intervene and prevent bullying.

Furthermore, allegiances are desperately needed among educational systems, parents and the public that teach how bullying is a societal issue. People need to know

that the intervention, prevention, and cessation of bullying rest with everyone (Pearce et al., 2011). Building stronger allegiances between schools and parents is necessary since anti-social behaviors and aggression is acted out on campus and often intensifies at home as cyberbullying. To help strengthen this allegiance, some schools have now implemented interventions and prevention curriculums to include parent involvement. Schools are now using programs such as Bully-Proofing Your School, Sticks 'n Stones, and Second Step to educate both teachers and students. Encouraging parents to get involved can aid in reducing and stopping the threat of escalation (Stop Bullying Now, n.d.).

Intervention programs that call on student's involvement is a key proponent. One report states that students were enthusiastic to play the role of peer advocate for those vulnerable to bullying (Cassidy et al., 2009). Some suggestions offered by students to combat cyberbullying were: (1) schools give lessons on practicing virtual safety to include educational modules demonstrating how to recognize and handle bullying and anti-social behavior in peers; (2) not returning nasty texts or instant messages (IMs); (3) setting up filters to block the bully from sending text messages; (4) talk to caring adults.

Forty years of bullying research has led to the creation of several anti-bullying preventative programs. Because of his research on school bullying, Dr. Olweus' research became the groundbreaking development of an intervention plan called, Bullying Prevention Program (Walton, 2005). His program is methodical in combating bullying. Used around the world, this modality is designed to have students complete assignments at home with parental supervision and involvement.

Findings on Cyberbullying and Suicide

Studies showed in 2013, thirty-eight percent of bully-victims had an increase in suicidal ideations with detailed plans to kill themselves. This report also revealed that cyber-victims were more likely to have thoughts of suicide than those bullied face to face (JAMA Pediatrics, 2014). Those who were bullied disclosed that ecological influences and risky activities, such as drug and alcohol use caused thoughts of suicide (Borowsky, Taliaferro, & McMorris, 2013). Equally revealing was a correlation connecting bullying and suicide, which often involves depressive symptoms and crime (Hertz, Donato, & Wright, 2013). For example, while living on a reservation, Jeff Weise, a sixteen year old, Native American Indian student murdered his grandfather and his female companion then drove to his high school, Red Lake Senior High, killed seven additional persons and injured five others before killing himself. Reports show that while in school, Weise had a long history of delinquent behavior and truancy, was bullied, and treated for depression. As a matter of fact, Weise attempted suicide twice in 2004 before the March 2005 murder-suicide (Maag, 2012).

In like manner, Eric Harris, Dylan Klebod, and Adam Lanza, all former bully-victims and school shooters, committed suicide. It is believed that bullying coupled with mental illness may have contributed to these young men killing so many teachers and classmates before ending their own lives (Greene & Ross, 2005). As a result of these crimes and to prevent future shootings, many teachers and parents expressed the need for

more legislature to confront the effects of anti-social behavior in public schools (Swearer et al., 2009).

Following the Columbine school shootings in 1999, Georgia was the first state to implement anti-bullying laws after experiencing its own school shooting violence. On May 20, 1999, exactly one month after the Columbine shooting, fifteen year old Thomas “T.J.” Solomon opened fire at Heritage High School in Conyers, Georgia. Solomon shot and wounded six people, but no one was killed. During his trial it was discovered that Solomon was a victim of bullying and suffered mental illness as a result. Realizing the need to protect their citizens, forty-nine states joined Georgia and now have anti-bullying legislature. To date, Montana remains the sole state awaiting to pass specific anti-bullying laws.

Most recently, California overhauled its laws regarding the Safe Place to Learn Act (2002). The Safe Place to Learn Act mandates that educators report bullying cases. This act gives school officials and educators more detailed guidelines to follow when encountering student bullies. The lawmakers believe that these new guidelines will generate accountability among school officials.

Additionally, to stay relevant with the growing and changing times, local state laws are constantly being updated as more research regarding bullying is made available. The latest update was in Georgia, when lawmakers adjusted and reinforced legislature by including cyberbullying as a crime (Bauman, 2012). Also, California revised its Education Code (EC). The Education Code is utilized by school administrators as a legal document to report when they discipline pupils. The EC now makes provisions for

bullying as it summarizes what actions are prohibited and are criminal (Associated Press, 2012). Hailed as a breakthrough, thirty-six states have joined California and have also made revisions to their Education Codes to include cyberbullying. Of these states, thirteen have now empowered school authorities to investigate bullying occurrences that transpire outside of school should it be proven that the bullying is creating a dangerous or unsafe situation.

Since educators are with students daily they are the first line of defense. With the increase in cyberbullying and teen suicide, it is extremely important that school administrators and teachers be trained to identify cyberbullying and how to effectively intervene.

A renowned initiative, STOMP Out Bullying is assisting schools and communities to become more educated on cyberbullying. Skilled in bullying, cyberbullying, and internet safety, Ross Ellis created STOMP Out Bullying in 2005 with a focus on helping at risk teens contemplating suicide. STOMP Out Bullying is used throughout the USA and across the globe. STOMP Out Bullying focuses on but is not limited to reducing and preventing bullying, cyberbullying, sexting, and other digital abuse, educating against homophobia, and racism. It also teaches parents how to train their kids in internet safety. According to its website, STOMP Out Bullying's goal is to deter school violence in schools, online, and in communities and teach effective solutions on how to respond to all forms of bullying (Stompoutbullying.gov, 2007).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This paper was designed to analyze and examine the impact of cyberbullying on depression and suicide among American high school students. The implications for social work practice and policy will be discussed in this chapter.

Summary of the Study

The social problem that is researched for this paper is the effects of cyberbullying on depression and suicide among American high school students. Bullying, a criminal behavior, has become a growing societal issue due to recent cases of youth suicides reported in several media outlets (Klomek, 2011). Research on bullying behavior is essential because school-aged students between twelve and eighteen are increasingly becoming victims of bullying.

A new manner of bullying has arisen, becoming more problematic than the traditional in-person bullying. Cyberbullying is the electronic posting of mean-spirited messages and embarrassing or threatening pictures about a person using cellular phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat room, and websites (Stopbullying.gov, 2014). What makes combating this social problem difficult is the lack of empirical research to correlate cyberbullying, depression, and suicide (Klomek, 2011).

An important finding was that increased bullying, especially cyberbullying, can lead to depression and depression can increase the chances of suicide among high school students. Some of the most severe incidents of cyberbullying end in suicide. Research documents that more than 4,500 suicidal deaths occur annually among American high school students (BullyingStatistics.org, 2013).

Cyberbullying may be more damaging to adolescents because: (1) perpetrators can be faceless, (2) perpetrators can have 24/7 access to their targets and/or victims via computers and cellular phones, (3) due to the physical distance, social media can be more callous, dispassionate, and merciless and (4) victims feel hopeless in reporting the bullying as they may lack physical evidence and they regard their parents and adults as out of touch to understand or unable to help them (Hinduja, 2009). Cyberbullying can impede vital communal relationships that are created to sustain a teen's psychological and social welfare as evidenced by Erik Erikson's stages of psychological development (Brent, 2003). Erikson believed that the adolescence stage, age twelve to eighteen is the identity versus role confusion. To explain, adolescents cultivate a sense of self and personal identity. In doing so, they are able to stay true to self, if they fail, they will have role confusion and lack a strong sense of sense. When teens have a weak sense of self they become vulnerable to bullying and may have a greater threat of suffering depression (Brent, 2003).

A major psychiatric dysfunction in teen suicidal behavior is depression. Victims of cyberbullying described experiencing aloneness, absenteeism from school/ truancy,

high levels of anxiety, and suicidal ideations (Swearer et al., 2009). Other warning signs of depression in adolescent bullies and bully-victims are extensive periods of unhappiness or persistent crying or surges of rage, decreased appetite and low to no energy, and noticeable mood swings (Brent, 2003). Recognizing and understanding the warning signs and symptoms are vital if parents, peers and school administrators are to combat bullying and provide the victims the professional help that is needed.

Although numerous intervention programs have been developed and are used in our educational systems, bullying remains a concern among today's teenagers, parents, and school administrators. Intervention can prevent suicide and does save lives.

Implications for Social Work

This study's findings provide implications for the profession of social work. One area of change is in the modification of daily practice. The education of teachers, parents, and adults on the various forms of bullying including traditional in-person, relational, and the focus of this paper, cyberbullying, lies within the scope of practice for social workers. Since most bullying incidents occur at schools, social workers and teachers can collaborate to instruct and inform both students and parents. For instance, social workers can conduct trainings on proper social media practices, teach strategies for responsible on-lining and proper use of cellular phones, and other technological uses to establish safety for all. Equally important, teachers, social workers, and parents can educate all school-aged students on technology etiquette, to include sending appropriate

text messages and pictures. In the same fashion, monitoring social networking activities, whether utilizing cellular phones or in-person communications, asserts itself as a fundamental component of training for teachers and parents. By monitoring student interactions, adults advance in their awareness of bullying when intervention is most effective, resulting in the cessation of bullying and the reduction of damages and suffering to victims. As a result, the odds of students being depressed and suicidal decreases.

The findings imply that cybervictims suffer higher levels of psychological distress (Schneider, 2012). Within the educational system social work practitioners could work to develop and help implement anti-bullying programs comprised of social work practice theories and models. These strategies hold the potential to prevent bullying and intervene when students face the problem of harassment. Also, social workers are able to assist bully-victims actively involved in bullying by teaching them coping skills. Learning how to cope when being bullied may reduce the chances of a student becoming homicidal and/or suicidal.

The findings also imply that early detection can prevent bullying. Early detection is a proactive approach to help bully-victims reject the options of homicides and/or suicides. By engaging parents in the community through education, social work practitioners aid them in identifying whether their child might be a bully or victim as well as inform them of the possible morbidity or mortality risk in both instances. Early detection leads to prevention, which is a two-fold process that not only includes

recognizing the consequences of bullying on the victim but also acknowledges the makeup factors of the perpetrator. StopBullying.org (2014) warns, a child may be a bully when they have: (1) physical or verbal altercations, (2) associations with known bullies, (3) marked aggression, (4) problems with school authorities, or (5) are concerned about their status, popularity, and likeability. Identification of the warning signs by parents empower them to intervene to stop the bullying and initiate professional mental health counseling. Social work practitioners should advocate that parents, peers, and teachers support the efforts of those students who seek help.

Several findings conclude that the collaboration of social media outlets with local and federal governments contain the necessary authoritative power to prevent cyberbullying and to establish better anti-bullying laws. Social work practitioners can lobby for legislature to impose anti-bullying features on social media outlets. Outlets such as Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, What's App, Groupme, and Instagram need to recognize and accept the responsibility their services contribute to the criminal act of cyberbullying among American high school students. Enacting policies that would mandate social media applications to flag activities and conversations that appear threatening and risqué in nature would aid in minimizing, if not, stop cyberbullying. Creating a safer cyberworld for students necessitates the usage of special computer software with filters to block the bully from sending offensive messages and pictures as well as utilizing parameters to determine what themes and/or words to flag or halt. Developing a special social media task force to include police officers, medical and

psychiatric doctors, social work practitioners and nurses enlist the aid of essential professionals in the control of cyberbullying as well as its aftermath. This task force would work directly with Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and all other social media outlets to investigate any reported cases and immediately take the proper actions. Moreover, this social media task force would work with email providers such as Gmail, Yahoo, and Hotmail to monitor and impede online bullying. Using special computer software, any inappropriate or threatening email conversations or photos would be flagged or ceased. Likewise, key bullying words or threatening posts would be reported and the same procedures would be followed as with the social media outlets.

Is it coincidental or destiny that at the completion and submission of this paper, the topic of bullying would be bustling in the air? October is National Bullying Prevention Awareness Month. During this month, schools and organizations plan different anti-bullying activities to encourage communities to work together to stop bullying and cyberbullying by increasing awareness of the prevalence and impact of bullying on all children of all ages (Stompoutbullying.org). Activities that encourage school and community participation include making public service announcements by featured celebrities, asking students to forge friendships with someone they do not know, challenging others to be kind, and sharing inspirational stories on the STOMP Out Bullying site.

Social work practitioners recognize that sticks and stones break bones and unkind words leave emotional scars that hurt. With empathetic hearts, knowledge of important

aspects of human interactions, and use of current research, social workers understand bullying and the impact it has on our society and world at large. As an advocate for victims, social work practitioners are to speak out against harassment and bullying and campaign for practice and policies that safeguard students from bullying, especially cyberbullying. As a mediator for the bully, social work practitioners must educate them on the negative effect of harassing behaviors on their target and the environment. Social work practitioners advocate for victims and mediate for perpetrators in order to heal the wounds in society caused by bullying.

To conclude, technology has created a new world for our teenagers to exist in, often free of rules and supervising adults, but as cyberbullying continues to grow, we must find a way to protect our youth in this new cyberworld. By installing these implications for social work through the involvement of teachers, parents, students, social media companies, and government social work practitioners assist in making cyberbullying a problem of the past. The social work profession has within its varied theories and modalities the tools to make any form of bullying in our society, a thing of the past.

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