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Relationship Between Parental Attachment and Cyberbullying Within the Homeschooling Community

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Jason King

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Abstract

Cyberbullying has been a focus of research and societal concern since the advent of the internet. Both perpetrators and victims of cyberbullying experience significant adverse effects including depression, anxiety, internalizing and externalizing problems, suicidal ideation, and suicide. Despite the broad understanding of the impact of cyberbullying on mental and physical health, research has not prioritized the exploration of cyberbullying within the homeschooled population. The purpose of this quantitative survey design was to identify the characteristics and relationships between cyberbullying victimization and perpetration, attachment security, and religiosity in homeschooled adolescents. Using a framework of Bowlby's attachment theory, the Parental Attachment Questionnaire, Cyberbullying and Online Aggression Survey Instrument, and Centrality of Religiosity Scale were administered online through a sample of 77 homeschooled adolescents ages 12-17. Descriptive statistics and t-tests indicated that homeschooled adolescents have lower rates of both cyberbullying perpetration and victimization when compared to traditionally schooled adolescents and higher rates of attachment security and religiosity. This research contributes to positive social change by highlighting the existence and prevalence of cyberbullying in the homeschooled population as well as the protective factors of attachment security and religiosity. Homeschooled families, local communities, and governmental organizations can use this research in the implementation of policies and directives intended to diminish cyberbullying and its adverse effects among homeschoolers.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work first and foremost to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. I also dedicate this work to my wife, Abbie, and my children (Logan, Jordan, Evan, and Elijah), whose endless support, patience, humor, and love has provided strength and motivation to see this through to the end.

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I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to each of my committee members who have wholeheartedly invested their time, energy, and expertise throughout this process. I would like to particularly thank Dr. Mitchell Hicks, Dr. Tim Lionetti, and Dr. Chet Lesniak, who have each served as dissertation chair at different times. Their wisdom, kindness, patience, and thoughtful encouragement were priceless during this long process and the numerous challenges that arose. I would also like to thank Dr. Brent Robbins, second committee member, for his expertise in statistics and research design which provided invaluable direction and guidance.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Numerous problematic behaviors and signs of mental distress can be seen in perpetrators of bullying and cyberbullying in addition to a range of physical, social, and academic issues. Bullies are more likely to engage in criminal behavior (Barker et al., 2008; Ganesan et al., 2021), truancy (Cardwell et al., 2021; Ybarra et al., 2007; Wilson et al., 2013), and substance use (Kristsotakis et al., 2017; Tharp-Taylor et al., 2009). Bullies and cyberbullies are also more likely to report physical symptoms such as sleep disturbances, tiredness, dizziness, tension, headaches, and abdominal pain (Beckman et al., 2012; Gini, 2007; Hesketh et al., 2010; Moore et al., 2017). Both perpetration and victimization have also been associated with anxiety, depression, attention-hyperactivity, thought problems, and violent behavior (Garaigordobil & Machimbarrena, 2019). In addition, both cyberbullying and cyber-victimization can have a negative impact on academic performance (Garaigordobil & Machimbarrena, 2019; Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2009), with cyberbullying demonstrating a stronger negative influence than traditional bullying (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). The strong influence that cyberbullying has on psychological, physiological, and academic functioning reinforces the importance of exploring factors that buffer adolescent bullies and victims from these negative effects.

Certain personal, familial, and cultural factors have been shown to help combat the propensity to either bully or be victimized, as well as mitigate the effects when bullying does occur (Ates et al., 2018; Fanti et al., 2012). Parental support, defined as perceived help, love, understanding, and comfort, significantly diminishes the likelihood of a child engaging in either bullying or victimization (Doty et al., 2017; Wang et al.,

2009), even when the child perceived their peer group as unsupportive (Fanti et al., 2012). Children are significantly less likely to bully or be victimized when their parents spent greater amounts of quality time with them (Cho et al., 2019; Dehue et al., 2012; Jeynes, 2007). Though healthy and supportive peer and academic groups have been found to contribute to less victimization, a higher quality of life, and higher life satisfaction (Gilmer &Huebner, 2006; Flaspohler et al., 2009), parental relationships demonstrate the highest degree of protection for children (Fanti et al., 2012; Hellfeldt et al., 2019).

Religiosity is another factor that can protect against bullying, which is a prevalent characteristic within the homeschooled community. Homeschooling parents seek to strengthen their family relationships, develop character, and instill personal values (Boschee & Boschee, 2011). They also appreciate the autonomy that comes with personally guiding their children's education (Noel et al., 2013), and emphasize the inclusion of religious development and moral instruction (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; McPhee et al., 2018). Over 90% of parents in a survey of over 11,000 homeschooling couples reported being Christian (Ray, 2010). This surpasses the 70.6% identifying as Christian within the U.S. population (Pew Research Center, 2014). This higher likelihood of religiosity within the homeschooled population merits consideration, particularly considering its correlation with mental distress and positive coping mechanisms. Religiosity and spirituality have been associated with a decreased risk for major depressive disorder, alcohol use disorder, and posttraumatic stress, along with a higher likelihood of dispositional gratitude, purpose in life, and posttraumatic growth (Sharma et al., 2017). Further, religiosity has been correlated with meaning, optimism,

coping with adversity, and resilience (Koenig et al., 2014; Park, 2005; Rosmarin et al., 2011).

Although no data has been found regarding social media usage among homeschoolers, their social nature prioritizes exploring their online presence and their propensity to either cyberbully or be victimized by cyberbullies (see Dumas et al., 2010; Medlin, 2013). This chapter stresses the importance of exploring the under-researched population of the homeschooled, specifically regarding their experiences with cyberbullying and victimization. This gap in literature merited the use of a quantitative study that included the protective factors of religiosity and parental attachment, each of which tended to be influential within the homeschooled population. The likelihood of homeschoolers to either cyberbully others or be victims of cyberbullying suggested the potential existence of vulnerabilities and protective factors.

Background

Bullying

The predominant perception throughout history has been that bullying is a natural element in youthful relationships and considered age-appropriate behavior (Allanson et al., 2015). This understanding of bullying is rooted in the belief that bullying is a natural result of the engrained drive to succeed and be the best (Donegan, 2012). Real-life incidences of bullying were initially described in news accounts, beginning in England in 1862 with the account of the death of a soldier and his having been the “victim of long, malignant, and systematic bullying” (The Times, 1862, as cited in Koo, 2007). However, the first known scientific article to address bullying was written by Burk in 1897, who

described bullying as incidents where “threats of exposure, injury, or imaginary dangers were the instruments of subjection and control” (as cited in Koo, 2007, para. 2). Despite this early addition to the field of bullying research, exploration of bullying did not become mainstream until the 1970s (Allanson et al., 2015). Today, bullying is recognized as intentional, repetitive harm to an individual in a position of diminished power (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015).

One reason that the focus on bullying has expanded is the technological advances of the past couple decades. Since the advent of the internet, numerous social media platforms have arisen, such as Snapchat, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram, giving teenagers with a presence on these platforms access to millions of users from around the world. As of January 2022, the number of active users total 2.9 billion for Facebook, 2.6 billion for YouTube, 2 billion for WhatsApp, 1.5 billion for Instagram, and 1 billion for Snapchat (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2022). And 95% of teenagers now report owning or having access to a smartphone (Pew Research Center, 2022). Further, a recent study indicates that 57% of American teenagers between the ages of 13–17 have formed a new friendship online, with 29% of those teens having formed at least five new friendships; however, only 20% of these teens have ever met their online friends in person (Lenhart et al., 2015). People also often present themselves differently online than in-person, making it more difficult to discern between beneficial, safe relationships and those that carry the potential for harm (Guadagno et al., 2012; Kang & Lee, 2019). In a recent study, only 32% of participants described themselves as always being honest online (Drouin et al., 2016).

The increase in attention to bullying has brought an increased understanding of the effects of being bullied with several areas of mental distress being correlated with bullying victimization. For example, victims of bullying have a significantly greater likelihood of depression (Christina et al., 2021; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2010; Lund et al., 2009; Moore et al., 2017). Victims of cyberbullying have been found to have a 1.9 times greater likelihood of attempting suicide when compared to those who have not been victimized (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). The harmful effects of cyberbullying are higher than those of traditional bullying, with higher levels of depression, self-injury, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts (Schneider et al., 2012; Zaborksi et al., 2019). Victimization has also been significantly correlated with anxiety, with estimates of between 35 and 45% of victims demonstrating symptoms of anxiety (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Depression, suicidality, and anxiety are significant psychological concerns for bullying victims that merit more attention.

Attachment

One important factor of parental relationships in mitigating or moderating the likelihood of bullying or being victimized is the influence of parental attachment. Parental attachment can be broadly identified as secure or insecure (Bowlby, 1969). Children who are securely attached to their parents perceive them as a secure base from which to safely explore their world (Ainsworth, 1969). Insecure attachment can result from parenting that is inattentive and unsupportive, resulting in children who view themselves as unlovable and perceive others as harsh and uninterested (Bowlby, 1969). Secure parental attachment has been correlated with children’s successful navigation of

the different stages of development throughout the lifespan (Kenny, 1987).

The influence of parental attachment on navigating the stages of life persists through adolescence, albeit in a slightly different manifestation. Adolescent children do not need the same degree of safety and comfort that they did when they were younger (Gamble & Roberts, 2005). Rather, they benefit from parental relationships that encourage emotional expression and exploration in a manner that facilitates the individuation that generally takes place throughout the adolescent years (Malekpour, 2007). Although parents can still protect, comfort, and provide opportunities for exploration, adolescents depend less on proximity and more on the trust that their relationship with their caregivers is secure (Gamble & Roberts, 2005). When parents and their children can interact in a way that encourages self-expression and the exchange of ideas, the relationship can be maintained and even enhanced despite differences in perspective (Allen et al., 2007). This manner of secure parental attachment has been correlated with higher degrees of resilience in teenagers (Jones & Morris, 2012; Masten & Narayan, 2012; Worley et al., 2018), which mitigates the effects of adversarial experiences (Masten, 2014).

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can be private and personal, between only a couple or few individuals, or it can be widespread as it permeates the victim's social network (Heirman & Walrave, 2008). One of the dangers of cyberbullying is that cyberbullies can affect their victims with an element of detachment, diminishing their realization and understanding of the consequences of their actions, whereas traditional bullying often

takes place in a direct personal encounter (Heirman & Walrave, 2008). Cyberbullying is also not limited to a particular population or demographic. Research has indicated its prevalence in populations of all races, genders, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation (Lemstra et al., 2012; Magklara et al., 2012; Mueller et al., 2015; Schneider et al., 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2022). Similarly, there is a wealth of data on students from traditional schooling environments, with the majority of research focusing on public school students. Although there are less data from private schools, available research indicates similar rates of prevalence between public and private schools (Lessne & Cidade, 2015). Estimates of prevalence vary widely due to variation in populations and methods used in tracking, but a metareview of 74 studies on cyberbullying revealed overall rates of around 21% of students being cyberbullied and approximately 15% having cyberbullied others (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Some studies have seen an increase over recent years, and particularly through the pandemic, with estimates around 23% (Hinduja & Patchin, 2022).

One population that has not received significant attention in bullying is that of the homeschooled population. As of this writing, no studies have been located concerning the prevalence of bullying within the homeschooled community. This lack of research is concerning when the potential effects of bullying are considered. A wide variety of mental, social, and physical problems have been linked to both bullying and victimization. A study of 6,097 men born in 1953 revealed a significantly higher likelihood of a first-time diagnosis of depression between the ages of 31 and 51 if those men had been bullied during their schooling (Lund et al., 2009). This is particularly the

case when experiencing high levels of victimization intensity (Pabian et al., 2021). Cyberbullying victims have been consistently found to have a higher likelihood of depression than victims of traditional bullying (Wang et al., 2011), and depression that has been correlated to bullying victimization has been linked to higher incidences of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Bauman et al., 2013; Christina et al., 2021). The effects of victimization persist throughout the lifespan, with adults with anxiety reporting higher likelihood of being bullied as a child (McCabe et al., 2010). Along with these and other mental disorders, victimization has been correlated with sleep disturbances, feeling tense and dizzy, headaches, and abdominal pain (Gini, 2007; Hesketh et al., 2009; Li et al., 2019). Similarly, academic performance has been shown to suffer (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2009; Laith et al., 2022), and criminal behavior such as substance use, truancy, and violence are significantly more likely (Barker et al., 2008; Tharp-Taylor et al., 2009; Wilson et al., 2013).

Religiosity

Religiosity involves three important characteristics: an extrinsic component that involves outward practice, such as attending church services and prayer; an intrinsic component of holding a foundational set of beliefs; and a search component that involves a continual search to relate to the divine (Hart et al., 2006). Religiosity correlates with several areas of mental health and overall quality of life. Numerous studies have indicated an inverse relationship between religiosity and depression (Bonelli et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2014, Smith et al., 2003; Stroppa & Moriera-Almeida, 2013). Religiosity has also been found to be a protective factor against suicide (Huguelet et al, 2007; Moreira-

Almeida et al., 2006), and recent research has indicated a significant relationship between resilience and religiosity (Javanmard, 2013; Kim & Esquivel, 2011). Religiosity can diminish risky behaviors such as delinquency (Regnerus, 2003), drug use (Piko & Fitzpatrick, 2004), and risky sexual behavior (Francis et al., 2019), each of which has been associated with bullying (Walters & Esplage, 2019; Ttofi et al., 2016; Sung Hong et al., 2016). Further, spiritual well-being, defined as a quality relationship with self, others, nature, and God (Fisher, 2010), has been directly associated with lower levels of bullying (Dutkova et al., 2017). The common beneficial influence of a healthy relationship with God or a higher power on mental health and risky behaviors suggest the importance of considering religiosity when assessing a population that emphasizes a relationship with God such as the homeschooled community.

Gap in Literature

Homeschooled students have historically experienced a higher degree of protection from influences their parents deemed harmful (Redford et al., 2017). However, the increase in social media usage and internet presence has diminished social limitation, providing access to people who had prior been less accessible. Despite this increase in exposure, a literature review revealed that the rates and impact of cyberbullying has not been explored in this population. Further, though homeschooled students seemingly benefit from increased parental support (Redford et al., 2017), the attachment style between homeschooled students and their parents has not been researched. The increase in the homeschooling population and the adverse effects of cyberbullying on both victims and perpetrators indicated the importance of considering the impact of cyberbullying

among homeschoolers. This research informed parents and leaders in protecting their children and aided in the provision of mental health services to those who have experienced cyberbullying.

Problem Statement

Cyberbullying continues to be a problem among adolescents, with more than 1 in 5 traditionally schooled students reported being bullied (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). The effects of being cyberbullied can include increased depression (Wang et al., 2011), suicide (Bauman et al., 2013), and risky/delinquent behaviors (Barker et al., 2008; Tharp-Taylor et al., 2009; Wilson et al., 2013). Despite the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying within traditional schools, there is a lack of research in this area within the homeschooled community, with no studies indicating prevalence or impact being currently available. Because of the impact of cyberbullying, gaining an understanding of the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying within the homeschooled community can help inform preventative measures and guide the administration of aid to those in need.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore the prevalence of cyberbullying within the homeschooling community and the influence that parental attachment security has on the propensity of homeschoolers to either bully or be victimized by bullies, while controlling for religiosity as a confounding variable. The existence of bullying and victimization within homeschooling communities has not received attention in research. Further, the attachment patterns of homeschooled children had not been researched despite the correlation between insecure parental attachment and

functioning throughout life, including patterns of relating (Dubois-Comtois et al., 2013), behavioral problems (Fearon et al., 2010), and lack of interpersonal sensitivity and heightened aggression (Cummings-Robeau et al., 2009). A quantitative survey design was used to identify the prevalence of cyberbullying within the homeschooled community as well as explore the relationship between parental attachment and religiosity with cyberbullying and victimization. This study was designed to fill the gap in literature which had not been addressed: the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying among homeschoolers and the potential influences of parental attachment and religiosity as protective or deleterious factors. The results of this study are expected to inform the homeschooled community as it seeks to cultivate a safe environment conducive to learning and maturation.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Existing research indicates that there are protective characteristics of both parental attachment and religiosity. However, these factors had not been explored in the homeschooled population, which informed the following research questions for this study:

- Research Question 1:What is the prevalence of cyberbullying among homeschooled adolescents when compared to traditionally schooled students?
    - $H_0$1: Rates of cyberbullying within the homeschooled population equal or surpass the rates of cyberbullying within the traditionally schooled population.
    - H_a1: Rates of cyberbullying within the homeschooled population are

significantly below the rates of cyberbullying within the traditionally schooled population.

- Research Question 2:What is the relationship between parental attachment security and the rates of cyberbullying and victimization among homeschooled adolescents when controlling for religiosity?
  - $H_0$2: Homeschooled adolescents with higher parental attachment security as indicated by the PAQ are less likely to engage in cyberbullying and be victimized by cyberbullying.
  - H_a2: Homeschooled adolescents with lower parental attachment security as indicated by the PAQ are more likely to engage in cyberbullying and be victimized by cyberbullying.

Theoretical Framework

Attachment style has been correlated with numerous areas of mental and social health with secure attachment supporting beneficial coping and relating (Allen et al., 2007; Dubois-Comtois et al., 2013; Duchesne et al.2009; Gearity, 2005), and insecure attachment leads to destructive relational tendencies (Tharner et al., 2012) and higher incidences of behavioral problems (Fearon et al., 2010). This section provides a framework to understand an aspect of homeschoolers' experiences with cyberbullying based on the nature of their attachment to their caregivers. The theory of parental attachment is further explained in Chapter 2.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory originated with John Bowlby beginning in the 1950s. Bowlby

(1958) suggested that inherent human characteristics predispose the infant to be drawn to appealing human experiences such as the warmth of skin and sparkling eyes even in the first few months of life. Bowlby furthered this idea by postulating that childhood disturbance is less influenced by experiences with breast-feeding and more significantly by the mother's response to clinging and following. Children seek parents for safety and comfort. In the absence of stress, children use their parents as a secure base from which to explore and interact with their world and their manner of relating to their parents develops into internal working models of relating which persist throughout life (Bowlby, 1969). Building on Bowlby's ideas of parental attachment, Mary Ainsworth expanded on the idea of secure or insecure parenting styles and further delineated insecure attachment into insecure-avoidant and insecure-ambivalent/anxious (Ainsworth, 1979). A fourth style called insecure-disorganized was later added (Main & Solomon, 1986).

Attachment Beyond Infancy

Research has further demonstrated the impact these early experiences with caregivers have on relating throughout adolescence and adulthood. The internal working model of relating that develops between a child and caregiver persists and informs future interactions (Dubois-Comtois et al., 2013). Secure attachment aids in self-regulation and resilience (Schore & Schore, 2008). Contrarily, insecure attachment inhibits the regulation of emotion and responses to stress with insecure-avoidant people instinctively believing that engagement could result in rejection and insecure-ambivalent people engaging in an energetic and persist manner based on their history of inconsistent attention (Tharner et al., 2012). Insecure attachment has been associated with increased

behavioral problems throughout childhood and into adolescence, particularly with boys (Fearon et al., 2010). Further, negative cognitive schemas resulting from insecure attachment, such as self-perceptions of worthlessness, being unlovable, or lacking efficacy, have been significantly and positively associated with anxiety and depression (Duchesne et al., 2009). The influence of parental attachment through adolescence with its protective or inhibiting characteristics will inform this exploration of cyberbullying within the homeschooled community. Chapter 2 will provide a more in-depth background on attachment theory.

Nature of the Study

This study followed a quantitative design using surveys to explore the relationship between the independent variable of parental attachment and the dependent variable of cyberbullying, with religiosity being held constant as a possible confounding variable. Participants included homeschooled adolescents of ages 14–17 who had been homeschooled for at least 2 years. These participants completed the PAQ, which measures parental attachment (Kenny, 1987), the Cyberbullying and Online Aggression Survey Instrument (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015), and the Centrality of Religiosity Scale, a measure on religiosity (Huber & Huber, 2012). The presence of these three variables merited the use of a partial correlation, which explores the relationship between two variables while holding a third variable constant (Jackson, 2009).

Definitions

Attachment: The bond developed between a child and caregiver that influences the development of the child's model for social relatedness throughout the lifespan

(Bowlby, 1988; Dubois-Comtois et al., 2013).

Bullying: for the purposes of this study, an encompassing term indicating all facets of bullying, including both traditional bullying and cyberbullying, each of which require intention and repetitive harm to a vulnerable target (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015).

Cyberbullying: Interactions through an electronic medium that intentionally, repetitively, and harmfully target an individual in a position of diminished power (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015).

Insecure attachment: Attachment patterns that develop when a caregiver does not routinely meet the needs of their child, resulting in children perceiving themselves as unlovable and others as harsh and uninterested (Bowlby, 1969).

Insecure-ambivalent/anxious attachment: A pattern of attachment developed from caregivers who are unpredictable, being tender and responsive at times, but neglecting, insensitive, and emotionally unavailable at other times. This results in a child who is confused, lacks confidence, and becomes easily agitated (Ainsworth, 1979).

Insecure-avoidant attachment: A pattern of attachment developed from caregivers who tend to be easily angered, physically distant, unresponsive, and rejecting, resulting in a child who learns to avoid social interaction to limit unpleasant interactions (Ainsworth, 1979).

Insecure-disorganized attachment: An attachment pattern that included characteristics of secure attachment and the other types of insecure attachment but involves a competition or inhibition of these other attachment patterns, resulting in a disorganization of thought and relating (Main & Solomon, 1986).

Religiosity: The patterns of thought and behavior that are associated with religious expression (Hill & Pargament, 2003).

Secure attachment: An attachment pattern that develops a caregiver consistently and adequately attends to the needs of their child (Bowlby, 1988).

Traditional bullying: In-person peer aggression that involves intentionality, repetition, and a power differential (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015).

Assumptions

Several assumptions were made throughout the course of this study. Data collection was conducted using an anonymous online survey. The research subjects and I never personally interacted outside of participant interest. As such, there was a reliance on the participants to respond accurately to the survey questions considering there was no oversight throughout the survey response. Further, the expectation was that they completed the surveys without any outside input and adequately understood the items and terms therein. Participants were required to meet certain characteristics, such as being of ages 14–17, currently homeschooled, and have been homeschooled for at least 2 years. These details could not be verified through an online survey, which requires an element of trust. One of the goals of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of cyberbullying within the homeschooled population. The data collected were generalized to the broader homeschooled population. Therefore, the inherent assumption was that the participants were indicative of the homeschooled population throughout the United States.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was narrowed through the selection of population and emphasis on the influence of parental attachment on cyberbullying prevalence. Though no significant research had been located on cyberbullying within the homeschooled population, including the independent variable of parental attachment and the control of a possible confounding variable of religiosity strengthened the potential usefulness of the results with a more detailed explanation of what has been found.

There are certain delimitations that need to be considered. This study targeted homeschooled students of a certain age range, and the results reflect such population choices and potentially limit generalization. The participants were also required to have been homeschooled for at least two years, eliminating those who might have legitimate and applicable bullying experiences but less homeschool experience. This decision was made to strengthen any inferences made between the variable of homeschooling and experiences with cyberbullying.

Limitations

There were several potential limitations in this study to consider. Using an online survey diminished researcher oversight, which necessitates trusting respondents to answer with honesty and integrity. Survey research has other inherent limitations, including low response rates (Gerrish & Guillaume, 2006) and a restriction in the range of potential responses when using closed-ended questions. Using convenience sampling brings a number of inherent limitations related to generalization, such as the sample being overly represented by individuals who prefer answering surveys. In addition, the

sampling may not represent different ethnicities or genders. The data obtained in this study are correlational, so effects cannot be construed as causal.

Significance

This study is significant considering the lack of research on the homeschooled population in existing literature. An extensive literature search showed no prior research on cyberbullying or parental attachment among homeschoolers. Each of these variables can have a considerable impact on an individual's mental health and quality of relationships. Including the variables of religiosity and parental attachment in exploring cyberbullying can aid in identifying positive coping mechanisms and protective factors which can then be strengthened among homeschoolers and expanded to other populations. The importance of considering attachment when addressing both bullying and other mental health issues could be emphasized, particularly if the results of parental attachment among homeschoolers leads to correlations of parental attachment and other areas of mental health. The possibilities of positive social change are extensive, with parents, mental health providers, educators, researchers, and policy makers being better informed on the benefits or drawbacks in homeschoolers and ways to extend positive characteristics of homeschooling to other forms of schooling.

Summary and Transition

This chapter introduced the lack of research on the homeschooled population and their experiences with bullying and the importance of addressing this gap in the literature with a quantitative design. The variables of religiosity and parental attachment were outlined, including the protection they provide toward certain areas of health and well-

being. This protection emphasizes the importance of including them in a study that considers a population that seemingly exhibits a high propensity toward religiosity and establishes unique familial relationships in combining parent with teacher. This study will inform the homeschooled community and those who are considering homeschooling with information relating to the children's experiences with cyberbullying and the protective nature of the parental relationship and religiosity within the context of homeschooling.

Chapter 2 will provide a comprehensive review of the theory, variables, and population considered in this study. Chapter 3 will address the specific methods being used to obtain and analyze the data. In Chapter 4, the data results and analysis will be specified. Chapter 5 will provide an interpretation of the results that included important considerations regarding the theoretical framework, limitations, and existing research. It will also offer recommendations for further research to extend the current understanding of the studied phenomena.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Cyberbullying has become a major concern among American youth. Despite a consistent decline in traditional bullying over the last 20 years (DeVoe et al., 2011), research shows that incidents of cyberbullying are increasing. Studies have estimated that up to 59% of public school students have experienced cyberbullying in some form (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008). These experiences include being threatened, disrespected, called names, picked on, made fun of, or having rumors spread about them, and close to 60% of victims report the effects of online bullying influencing their experiences at school, home, or among friends (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). These effects include increased depression, suicidal ideation, and attempted suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Protecting children from bullying has become increasingly difficult with the growth of the internet and social media (Whittaker & Kowalski, 2014). Recent estimates have 47% of Hispanic teens, 45% of Black teens, and 26% of White teens reporting using at least one of YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, or Facebook almost constantly (Pew Research Center, 2022).

The prevalence and effects of cyberbullying underscore the importance of exploring the existence and impact of cyberbullying within under researched populations. One such population is that of homeschooled children. Homeschooling has become a popular alternative to traditional schooling and is the fastest growing educational sector with over 5 million students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). It increased from 1.7% of American students to 3.4% of students between 1999 and 2012 (Beilick et al., 2001; Redford et al., 2017), and 3.3% in 2016 to 11.1% in the 2020-2021 school year (U.S.

Census Bureau, 2021). Despite this large estimated population, there is little to no research on the prevalence and impact of bullying and cyberbullying among homeschoolers. The increase in accessibility to formerly insulated peer groups, including homeschooled children, and the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying supports the current study (a) to examine the prevalence of cyberbullying within the homeschooled community and (b) to examine the relationship between parental attachment and the prevalence of cyberbullying within the homeschooled community.

The following chapter begins with an overview of the search strategy used in reviewing the existing literature. An outline of the underlying theoretical framework of attachment theory is provided. The existing literature on the variables of cyberbullying and parental attachment is presented. Finally, the current state of research is summarized, including gaps in the literature related to cyberbullying within homeschooling and the relationship between parental attachment and victimization.

Organization of the Literature Review and Literature Search Strategy

For the purposes of this review, a comprehensive search was conducted through the Walden University library and Google Scholar. Filters were employed that limited the search to peer-reviewed articles between the years of 2006-2020 to ensure that the latest data were used. These articles were selected based on reliability, validity, and the use of rigorous scientific methods of research. Articles originating prior to 2006 were utilized to provide a historic perspective, develop a theoretical framework, and emphasize progression of thought. Search words included *attachment, attachment and bullying, attachment and resilience, bullying, cyberbullying, bullying and mental health, bullying*

and development, *bullying and academics*, *homeschooling*, and *bullying and homeschooling*. Searches in the areas of cyberbullying and parental attachment within the homeschooled population revealed no existing literature.

Theoretical Framework

This section will outline the ideas of attachment theory. It begins with the historical perceptions of object-relations between infant and parent and progresses to modern attachment theory as posited by John Bowlby. Further developments in attachment theory are delineated, including characteristics in adolescence that have been correlated to parental attachment rooted in childhood experience.

Early Views of Object-Relations and Personality

Sigmund Freud was the first to posit a comprehensive theory of personality and human development. Freud was influenced by evolutionary thought and approached many aspects of human development from a phylogenetic perspective. According to Freud, the development of the ego and the libido, including psychosexual schemata such as the Oedipus complex, are inherited through the common experience of humankind throughout history (Freud, 1917). Consequently, the perception of psychopathology became rooted in evolutionary considerations, and the contributions of life experience to psychopathology were minimized (Bowlby, 1988). In early psychological thought, the importance of the relationship between infant and mother was largely relegated to the infant's identification of the mother as a source of nourishment and the father as a source of protection (Freud, 1925). Thus, anxiety resulting from the absence of a mother was due to the fear of needs remaining unmet (Freud, 1926). Freud's theories continued to

influence ideas of human development throughout the rise of attachment theory.

The development of attachment theory progressed from Sigmund Freud's theories with the split of the British Psycho-analytical Society in 1946 into two separate courses of training, the "A" group following Anna Freud and the "B" group following Melanie Klein (Geissmann & Geissmann, 1998). Shortly thereafter, a third group arose that eventually became known as the "Middle School." The Middle School's approach to object relations stressed the idea that infants' relationships with their environment, especially the mother-child relationship, strongly influenced developing schema (Geissmann & Geissmann, 1998). These ideas were consistent with many of the theoretical propositions of the primary figure in attachment theory, John Bowlby.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory

John Bowlby is credited with being the father of modern attachment theory. His ideas were influenced by many areas of psychological and scientific research. He became familiar with object-relations theory through the training of Joan Riviere and Melanie Klein; however, he differed from his supervisors in his perception of children's ties to their mothers (Bretherton, 1992). In the 1950s, Bowlby became interested in the animal research of Harry Harlow and Konrad Lorenz, who demonstrated separation distress and proximity seeking in infants and solidified Bowlby's belief that the infant–mother relationship is primarily strengthened through proximity (Bowlby, 1958). Bowlby postulated that childhood disturbance is significantly influenced by the mother's response to clinging and following (Bowlby, 1958). Parents are a haven to children in times of stress, and the children seek them for safety and comfort. In the absence of stress,

children use their parents as a secure base from which to explore and interact with their world (Bowlby, 1969). If parents are inattentive and rejecting, children develop an insecure attachment and view themselves as unlovable and others as harsh and uninterested (Bowlby, 1969).

Though the quality of the mother–child relationship is broadly assessed as secure or insecure, different subgroupings of insecure attachment have been postulated. Initially three classifications of insecure attachment were suggested: secure, insecure-avoidant, and insecure-ambivalent/anxious (Ainsworth, 1979). A fourth style called insecure-disorganized was later added (Main & Solomon, 1986).

The different attachment styles have been correlated to characteristics of parenting. According to Ainsworth (1979), caregivers of insecure-avoidant children tend to avoid physical contact, limit their responsiveness, reject the child, and become easily angered. The child begins to view their parents, and others, as undependable and critical. Insecure-ambivalent/anxious children experience their parents as being unpredictable. The parents might be attentive and sensitive to their needs at times, but neglecting, insensitive, and emotionally unavailable at other times. This leads to ambivalence toward their parents. Children who are insecure-ambivalent/anxious do not know what to expect from their parents, and often behave in a confused, unsure, or agitated manner when interacting with their parents (Ainsworth, 1969). Children with insecure-disorganized attachment can demonstrate characteristics of secure, anxious, or avoidant behaviors, but they experience a competition and/or inhibition of these attachment behaviors, which results in an uncertainty in their response to caregivers (Hesse & Main, 1991). Thus, the

primary feature of a disorganized attachment pattern could entail a difficulty in the selection of appropriate response, resulting in apprehension. Furthermore, the potential for varying responses has resulted in children with disorganized attachment also being given a classification of one of the other attachment patterns (Sroufe et al., 1999). In contrast to insecure attachment, secure attachment breeds trust and confidence in caregivers. Though the child might become distressed when a caregiver departs, they tend to be responsive and easily comforted when the caregiver returns (Ainsworth, 1979).

Each of these styles are rooted in relational experiences that result in varying expectations of caregiver responsiveness. As the child progresses through life, these expectations are carried into other relationships. These early experiences begin the formulation of an internal working model, which influences the way relationships and social interactions are perceived and interpreted throughout the lifespan (Bowlby, 1969).

Influence of Attachment Through Adolescence

Though research in attachment during infancy can be traced back almost 100 years, the understanding of the nature and influence of attachment in adolescence has only recently been targeted in research (Allen et al., 2007). Attachment in adolescence is explored differently than attachment in childhood. Rather than identifying and assessing the nature and qualities of parental (most often maternal) relationships, characteristics of attachment in adolescence are often explored through intrapsychic and relational functioning (Allen & Land, 1999). Adolescent attachment can be conceptualized as seeking autonomy while still valuing relatedness within relationships (Main et al., 1998).

Though parental roles of being a secure base are still present, the individuation

process that occurs throughout adolescence becomes an important consideration (Rosenblum & Lewis, 2006). As children grow older and venture into adolescence, they venture from their secure base for greater lengths of time and distance (Bowlby, 1988). The need for safety and comfort is no longer realized through proximity but rather the trust that parents was available and accessible when they are needed (Gamble & Roberts, 2005). In addition, a secure adolescent-caregiver attachment relationship provides a nurturing environment for emotional expression through which the adolescent can learn to interact appropriately with others (Gearity, 2005). When these autonomous interactions take place in social relationships, relatedness between the parties can be maintained despite differences (Allen et al., 2007). These interactions influence the development of the internal working model. A personal model of the attachment figure develops, and this model is present despite physical distance from the parent. Adolescents then refer to this model as they engage in other social encounters (Dubois-Comtois et al., 2013).

Because adolescence is a time of emotional, cognitive, developmental, and relational change, internal working models of attachment are continually challenged and revised due to socioemotional and cognitive changes (Dubois-Comtois et al., 2013). Emotions fluctuate and are more intense during adolescence. This, paired with the innate drive for individuation, complicates adolescent-parent engagement when experiencing stressful situations (Ackard et al., 2006). Research indicates that adolescents often rely on friends during a stressful situation, look to their parental attachment figure for needs related to exploration, and turn to intimate relationships for comfort (Markiewicz et al., 2006). When a provocative situation is experienced, insecurely attached boys tend to

direct blame inward, whereas girls are more likely to blame others for the provocation (Dwyer et al., 2010). Further, insecure attachment has been associated with increased behavioral problems throughout childhood and into adolescence, particularly with boys (Fearon et al., 2010).

Thought and behavioral patterns that were nurtured through attachment relationships persist into adolescence and adulthood. Attachment style has been correlated to different personality characteristics and self-perceptions. Insecure and disorganized attachment results in an inability to regulate emotions and reactions to stress (Tharner et al., 2012). Insecure-ambivalent/anxious attachment has been associated with emotional dysregulation characteristics (Crawford et al., 2007), which include anxiety, oppositionality, submissiveness, cognitive distortions, self-harm, emotional lability, narcissism, identity confusion, and suspiciousness (Livesley, 1991). Insecure-avoidant attachment is also associated with difficulty with intimacy, constrained emotional expression, and avoidance of social interaction (Crawford et al., 2007). Insecure paternal attachment has been correlated with a lack of interpersonal sensitivity and heightened aggression (Cummings-Robeau et al., 2009). Insecurely attached adolescents view social interactions as negative or unrewarding and are more likely to be victims of bullying and engage in bullying behavior (Kokkinos, 2013). Conversely, the perception of parents as protective and nurturing has been found to predict diminished levels of adolescent aggression (Arim et al., 2009). Adolescents with secure attachments perceive harassment as negative and debilitating to relationships, resulting in less bullying and even intervention when the bullying of a peer is witnessed (Nickerson et al., 2008).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

Cyberbullying

With the advent of social media, bullying and victimization have increasingly occurred through an electronic medium. Despite evidence of traditional bullying rates remaining fairly constant (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Lessne & Cidade, 2015; Wang et al., 2009), estimates of cyberbullying indicate a slight increase in prevalence over time (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Between 2000 to 2010, online harassment almost doubled from 6% to 11% (Jones et al., 2013). However, estimates of the prevalence of cyberbullying vary in part due to a lack of consistent definition, varied methodological approaches, and the use of focused populations. According to Patchin and Hinduja (2015), the definition of cyberbullying should include elements of repetition, intent, harm, and imbalance of power, which refers to an inability to defend oneself (Roland, 1989), treatment by a more dominant individual (Stephenson & Smith, 1989), or characteristics that might provide a degree of power of one individual over another (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). Furthermore, some studies will consider experiences throughout the lifespan (Beran et al., 2012; Law et al., 2012), whereas others will limit respondents to the past 30 days (Dempsey et al., 2011) or previous 2–3 months (Kubiszewski et al., 2015; Hong et al., 2012). Variability in research approaches has contributed to estimates of cyberbullying ranging from as low as 7% (Ybarra, 2004) to as high as 72% (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). A recent metareview of 35 studies revealed that an average of 24% of students had experienced cyberbullying, and 17% had perpetrated cyberbullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012). Overall, estimates of prevalence tend to range

between 10% and 40% (Kowalski et al., 2014).

These high estimates are not limited to particular populations. Bullying persists across ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic (SES) status, and medium of schooling. Studies on race in America has produced varied results, with some studies reporting higher rates of victimization within White populations (Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2012), other studies indicating higher rates of victimization among minority populations (Schneider et al., 2012), and others intimating that race/ethnicity is not a significant factor (Seals & Young, 2003). Research reveals that sexual orientation is correlated with a significantly higher likelihood of victimization (Mueller et al., 2015; Berlan et al., 2010; Schneider et al., 2012; Birkett et al., 2009). Students of low SES have been identified as being significantly more likely to bully and be a victim of bullying (Bowes et al., 2009; Magklara et al., 2012), BUT students of high SES were less likely to either bully or be victimized (Analitis et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2009; Lemstra et al., 2012). However, it has been surmised that the link between bullying, victimization, and SES is an indirect relationship. There is evidence that family variables related to SES could be primary, such as harsher restrictive and authoritarian parenting (Hoff et al., 2002), existence and extent of sibling violence (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006), and exposure to domestic violence (Cunradi et al., 2002). Another popular theory on the association between SES and bullying concerns the evolutionary perspective of bullying being used to improve social status or gain access to coveted resources (Olthof & Goossens, 2008). Accordingly, higher levels of bullying have been found in societies with hider degrees of social inequality (Due et al., 2009; Elgar et al., 2009).

Research is limited on bullying and cyberbullying in different approaches to schooling. The majority of studies have been conducted using public school students. The limited information that is available indicates similar prevalence rates in bullying and cyberbullying in both public and private schools. In a survey of 24 million students, 21.5% of public-school students and 21.4% of private school students reported victimization of traditional bullying, while 6.9% of both private and public-school students reported victimization from cyberbullying (Lessne & Cidade, 2015). However, rates vary within different populations. A study of Colombian students revealed that students were more than twice as likely to bully within a private school than a public school (Chaux et al., 2009), while a study of Turkish students found public students to be significantly more likely to report cyberbullying than private school students, despite using less internet-mediated communication tools (Topcu et al., 2008). As scant as research on private school students is, there is less information regarding bullying and cyberbullying within the homeschooled community.

Effects of Bullying

One of the reasons that bullying has received considerable attention is the significant potential for harm. Bullying can result in psychological, physiological, and academic problems. These effects can occur regardless of the type of bullying or the setting in which the bullying takes place. With even low estimates in research suggesting that more than one in every five students has experienced some form of bullying (Lessne & Cidade, 2015), the psychological, physiological and academic functioning of the approximately 76 million elementary and secondary school students (McFarland et al.,

2017) within the United States could be detrimentally affected.

The potential psychological effects of bullying and bullying victimization are clearly seen in existing research. Depression has been strongly correlated to both bullying and victimization. In a 2-year longitudinal study of 2,070 Finnish students, bullying and victimization at age 15 was found to predict depression at age 17 (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2010). A study of 6,097 men born in 1953 revealed higher likelihood of a first-time diagnosis of depression between the ages of 31 and 51 if those men had been bullied during their schooling (Lund et al., 2009). Depression that is correlated to bullying victimization has been significantly linked to suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Bauman et al., 2013). When compared to students who had never been victimized by bullying, Hinduja and Patchin (2010) found that victims of traditional bullying were 1.7 times more likely to attempt suicide, and victims of cyberbullying were 1.9 times more likely to attempt suicide. Depression is consistently more highly correlated to cyberbullying victimization than traditional bullying victimization (Wang et al., 2011). Victims of cyberbullying have also been found to demonstrate higher levels of depressive symptoms, self-injury, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts than victims of traditional bullying (Schneider et al., 2012).

Bullying and bullying victimization has also been significantly correlated to anxiety and specific anxiety disorders. Kowalski and Limber (2013) estimate that between 35 and 45 percent of victims demonstrate symptoms of anxiety, with higher levels of anxiety associated with cyberbullying than traditional bullying. Bullying victimization has been found to be more significantly correlated with long-term elevated

levels of anxiety than even family and parental factors such as rejection or lack of protection (Van Oort et al., 2011). Effects of victimization can persist into adulthood, with adults with anxiety reporting higher likelihood of being bullied as a child (McCabe et al., 2010). This is particularly the case for social anxiety (Boulton, 2013; van Oort et al., 2011).

Numerous behavioral and social problems have been associated with bullying. Research has shown that both bullies and victims are more likely to demonstrate behaviors such as criminal behavior (Barker et al., 2008), truancy (Wilson et al., 2013), and substance use (Tharp-Taylor et al., 2009). Research suggests that victims of bullying are significantly more likely to engage in violent and antisocial behaviors when compared to individuals uninvolved in bullying or victimization (Liang et al., 2007).

Bullying victims tend to report a greater variety, and a higher severity, of psychosomatic problems. Traditional bullying and cyberbullying tend to demonstrate similar influence in producing physical issues related to bullying (Beckman et al., 2012). However, variation can be seen between bullies, victims, and bully/victims. Bullying victims are significantly more likely than bullies or bully/victims to report sleeping disturbances, tiredness, feeling tense and/or dizzy, headaches, and abdominal pain (Gini, 2007). In addition, bullying victims are more likely to produce complaints of headache and/or abdominal pain than individuals experiencing corporal punishment, fear of teachers, pressure to achieve scholastically, or academic difficulty (Hesketh et al., 2009).

Research suggests a correlation between academic performance and both bullying and victimization. A meta-analysis of 33 studies on the relationship between bullying and

academic performance revealed a small but significant negative correlation across all studies (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2009). Kowalski and Limber (2013) found a stronger relationship between cyberbullying and academic performance than traditional bullying and academic performance. The negative effects on academic performance have been attributed to variables such as the perception of an unsafe academic environment (Varjas et al., 2009), and difficulty concentrating and increasing frustration in school (Beran & Li, 2007). Along with the broad effect of diminished academic performance, cyberbullying increased school related problems such as an increase in detentions, truancy, and the bringing of weapons to school (Ybarra et al., 2007). The strong influence that cyberbullying has on psychological, physiological, and academic functioning reinforces the necessity of exploring factors that buffer adolescents from these negative effects.

Protective and Risk Factors

Although cyberbullying prevalence estimates tend to range between 20% and 40% (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012), even the highest estimates indicate that most students are not victimized. Furthermore, the severity of the negative effects of cyberbullying are not consistent for everyone. The variation in individual experience with cyberbullying suggests the existence of mitigating and moderating factors.

Major risk and protective factors include elements of adolescents' familial, peer, and teacher relationships. Perceived support from each of these groups influences the likelihood of victimization or participation in bullying behaviors. Parental support, defined as perceived help, love, understanding, and comfort, significantly diminishes the

likelihood of a child engaging in either bullying or victimization (Wang et al., 2009). In a 2-year longitudinal study, adolescents in single-parent families with low perceived friend support but high familial support were significantly less likely to be victims of cyberbullying. However, when those adolescents perceived low levels of both familial and peer support, they were significantly more likely to be cyber-victimized (Fanti et al., 2012). Certain elements of familial relatedness have been isolated as contributing factors. Research suggests that importance in the family structure is important for boys, and a sense of belonging and acceptance is particularly important for girls (Brighi et al., 2012). Parents who spend greater amounts of quality time with their children diminish bullying behaviors and victimization (Dehue et al., 2012; Jeynes, 2008), and children's belief that their father does not spend enough time with them has shown a strong correlation to behavioral problems such as bullying (Christie-Mizell et al., 2011). The homes of victims tend to feature criticism, fewer rules, and maltreatment, while bullies tend to lack parental supervision, experience maltreatment, and are more likely to be exposed to domestic violence (Holt et al., 2007). When parents supervise the use of the internet, the risk of bullying and victimization diminishes. Specific elements include the limitation and discussion of appropriate web sites (Mesch, 2009), limitations on time spent online (Twyman et al., 2010), and the regulation of exposure to media violence (Fanti et al., 2012).

The student-teacher relationship can also influence the prevalence and effects of bullying. A safe and healthy school environment can influence numerous aspects of students' well-being, including academic performance (Vedder et al., 2005), school

engagement (Chen et al., 2005), and mental health (Colarossi & Eccles, 2003; Malecki & Demaray, 2003). Along with limiting victimization, school support was found to increasingly limit the effects of peer victimization as students progressed through high school, indicating the possible greater importance placed in school support by students approaching their final years in high school (Stadler et al., 2010). Emotional and behavioral problems related to victimization seem to be buffered by emotional support from teachers (Yeung & Leadbeater, 2010).

Peer relationships can be an important consideration in bullying and victimization. The purpose of adolescent social media use is most often directed at strengthening or maintaining already existent relationships, although most of such relationships could be described as weak ties (Boneva et al., 2006; Ellison et al., 2007; Hampton & Wellman, 2003). As such, cyberbullying is most often perpetrated by those already known to the victim (Festl & Quandt, 2013). Reciprocal, supportive relationships with peers have been correlated to less victimization, higher quality of life, and higher life satisfaction (Gilman & Huebner, 2006; Flaspohler et al., 2009). Victims tend to report low peer acceptance, while bullies report high levels of peer acceptance but low levels of family support (Perren & Hornung, 2005; Fanti et al., 2012). This is consistent with research indicating the higher social status and centrality of a bully in their social network (Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007; Sijtsema et al., 2009). Despite high peer acceptance and social prominence, bullies rate poorly on likeability (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). However, adolescents are more likely to cyberbully if they perceive their peers as cyberbullies and expect less or no punishment from their parents (Hinduja & Patchin,

2012).

Morality has received significant attention as potential protective or risk factors in traditional bullying and cyberbullying. The concept of morality is broad and consists of several aspects. However, research consistently shows that bullies demonstrate several significant deficits. Bullies prioritize personal gains from bullying rather than acknowledging and prioritizing harmful effects to victims (Gini et al., 2011). They also tend to demonstrate lower levels of shame, guilt, or remorse regarding their thoughts and actions (Menesini & Camodeca, 2008; Perren & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012). This is consistent with research revealing high levels of moral disengagement (Almeida et al., 2012) and low levels of empathy (Caravita et al., 2009). Some research suggests that traditional bullies show higher levels of moral disengagement than cyberbullies (Pornari & Wood, 2010), potentially indicating less of a need to justify cyberbullying, and strengthening the argument that consequences of cyberbullying are less realized and understood due to the maintained distance in engagement. However, differences in moral disengagement between traditional bullies and cyberbullies has been found to be insignificant in other studies (Menesini et al., 2013).

Homeschooling has become a popular alternative to traditional schooling and is the fastest growing educational sector with close to 2 million students (Noel et al., 2013). Homeschooling has increased from 1.7 percent of American students to 3.4 percent of students between 1999 and 2012 (Beilick et al., 2001; Redford et al., 2016). Homeschooling families are 83 percent white, 89 percent above the poverty level, and can live in urban, suburban, or rural areas (Redford et al., 2016). Households are

generally well-educated, with 39% of parents having either a graduate or bachelor's degree, and another 30% having advanced vocational training (Noel et al., 2013). Homeschooled students consistently outperform traditionally schooled students in standardized testing (Rudner, 1999; Clemente, 2006), and college GPA (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004). Estimates of academic success have placed homeschooled children as high as 84th percentile in math, language, and social studies, 86th percentile in science, and 89th percentile in reading (Ray, 2010).

Parents provide a plethora of reasons for homeschooling their children. However, a common theme is the desire for autonomy in guiding their children's education and development (Anthony & Burroughs, 2012). By choosing to homeschool, parents take primary responsibility for the education and academic environment in which their children learn. The most frequently referenced reason in seeking this autonomy is the parents concern about the academic environment (Noel et al., 2013). Closely following are the inclusion of a religious focus to education, and moral instruction (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; McPhee et al., 2015). Strengthening family relationships, developing character, and instilling values are also commonly cited reasons (Boschee & Boschee, 2011). Although these reasons are listed as the primary influences in homeschooling, parents' beliefs concerning their parental responsibilities, efficacy in instructing their children, and comfort level with their personal resources have been found to be substantial contributors to the decision to homeschool (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007). Thus, the motivation to homeschool must be reinforced by parental capabilities and resources.

One of the most common arguments against homeschooling is the belief that homeschooling does not provide adequate socialization (Davis, 2011). The separation of children from their peers in public and private schools is often perceived as isolating (Jolly et al., 2013). However, research suggests that homeschooled children score significantly higher than public or private school students in total social skills, cooperation, assertion, and empathy (Medlin, 2013). They also tend to have higher quality relationships with their parents, other adults, and their best friends (McKinley et al., 2007). While spending significantly more time with parents, homeschooled children are also more active in social activities and people outside of their family (Dumas et al., 2010; Medlin, 2013).

Research on bullying and cyberbullying within the homeschooled community largely focuses on the use of homeschooling as a strategy used to remove children from an environment in which bullying is already occurring (Howell, 2013). However, there is noticeable overlap in research between characteristics of homeschoolers and homeschooling families, and the factors that have been found to diminish the likelihood of bullying or being victimized, such as an emphasis on morality, parental supervision, and time spent with family. There is a dearth of research specifically addressing bullying or cyberbullying in the homeschooled community, to the extent that no viable research was found in this area.

Parental Attachment and Bullying

A strong relationship between parental attachment and both bully perpetration and victimization has been repeatedly established in the literature. These relationships can be

explicitly seen in research focused on the association between attachment, and perpetration and/or victimization (Nikiforoue et al., 2013; Walden & Beran, 2010), or implicitly in studies that explore factors such as aggression, warmth, and compassion and their correlation to perpetration and/or victimization (Buck, 2015; Kokkinos, 2013; Mikulincer et al., 2003). Regardless of the variations in foci, the literature demonstrates the significance of the parent-child attachment style in the likelihood of bullying and/or being victimized.

Explanations of the attachment/bullying relationship rely on the idea that children develop a model of sociality through their relationships with caregivers. Parents who are warm and inviting raise children who tend to be warm and affectionate in their relationships with others, while parents who are insensitive to their children's needs or outwardly reject them tend to have children who reject others are ambivalent toward creating and sustaining quality relationships (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Thompson, 2008). Adolescents who perceive themselves as securely attached to their caregivers are less likely to bully others or be victimized and having a lesser quality relationship with caregivers increases the probability that those children will bully others or be bullied themselves (Walden & Beran, 2010). People with secure attachment patterns tend to be compassionate and more likely to help others in distress (Mikuliner et al., 2005), however, insecure ambivalent attachment is related to victimization, and avoidant adolescents tend to be more aggressive and exhibit less warmth, leading to a higher probability that they will engage in bullying others (Kokkinos, 2013).

Characteristics influenced by attachment style can contribute to bully

perpetration. Maternal sensitivity has been associated to secure attachment and diminishes the likelihood that a child will engage in antisocial behaviors such as aggression, insensitivity, and impulsiveness (Buck, 2015; Crawford et al., 2007), whereas securely attached adolescents exhibit higher levels of empathy, possess a greater capacity to regulate emotional, are more likely to be prosocial, and view harassment as negative and debilitating in relationships (Berlin et al., 2008; Nickerson et al., 2008; Tharner, 2011).

Attachment style can have a variety of effects on adolescent vulnerability. Victims of bullying are significantly more likely to exhibit characteristics of insecure attachment than their unvictimized peers (Koiv, 2012). Social and emotional competence protect against victimization, each of which can be severely hindered in insecurely attached individuals, leading to greater degrees of victimization (Brumariu, 2015; Groh et al., 2014; Van Rizin & Leve, 2012; Zych et al., 2017). Adolescents who are anxiously attached tend to react to being victimized by withdrawing and distancing themselves from their peers (Guedes et al., 2018). These non-aggressive victims report having overprotective parents more than aggressive victims (Lereya et al., 2013), who often engage in a hostile manner intent on self-protection through the instillation of fear in others (Guedes et al., 2018).

Religiosity

The association of religiosity with parental attachment, bullying, victimization, and mental health supports its inclusion in a study focused on a population high in religiosity. The religious involvement of homeschooling families far surpasses that of the

general population with over 90 percent of homeschooling families claiming to be Christian and less than two percent professing atheism or agnosticism (Ray, 2010). Religious instruction and morality are consistently listed as a major contributing factor to parents' decision to homeschool their children (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; McPhee et al., 2015). A 2016 survey through the U.S. Department of Education found that 67 percent of parents list moral instruction as an important factor in deciding to homeschool and 51 percent list religious instruction, with 16 percent citing it as the most important factor (McQuiggan & Megra, 2017).

A high level of religiosity is a significant moderating factor in both the frequency and impact of bullying and victimization (Fisher, 2010; Huguelet et al, 2007; Walters & Esplage, 2019). Propensity to be bullied or bully others is diminished in individuals high in religiosity (Dutkova et al., 2017), and higher levels of spirituality/religiosity correlate to a stronger self-perception, diminishing the likelihood that people will engage in revenge or retaliation coping mechanisms, particularly when the individual emphasizes forgiving self and others (Hall & Flanagan, 2013). Intrinsic religiosity has been correlated to higher quality of life and less symptomology in patients with depression (Bonelli et al., 2012) and suicide (Huguelet et al, 2007; Mosqueiro et al., 2015), each of which are frequently associated with both bullying and victimization (Schneider et al., 2012).

Summary

Cyberbullying continues to be a significant problem in society. While traditional bullying seems to be declining, prevalence estimates of cyberbullying indicate an increase over the past decade (Lessne & Cidade, 2015). Although not yet as pervasive as

traditional bullying, (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012), cyberbullying is a stronger contributor to suicide, depression, self-injury, and poor academic performance than traditional bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Schneider et al., 2012; Kowalki & Limber, 2013). It is also a known contributor to anxiety, psychosomatic problems, and delinquent behavior (Ybarra et al., 2007; Van Oort et al., 2011; Beckman et al., 2012).

Despite the widely acknowledged and influential problem of cyberbullying, homeschooled adolescents have not received the attention of researchers. Such a study could provide information into the nature and extent of cyberbullying within the homeschooled community. Are cyberbullying prevalence rates within the homeschooled community similar to other researched populations? Does the homeschooling emphasis on family relationships result in secure attachment through adolescence? Are the protective factors correlated to secure attachment that seem to be prevalent within homeschooling families resulting in diminished victimization and cyberbullying? A quantitative research model that addresses these questions will be proposed in the next section.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The trending increases in homeschooling (Noel et al., 2013) and internet usage among adolescents (Pew Research Center, 2022; Whittaker & Kowalski, 2014) merited an exploration of experiences that can be common and harmful for adolescents. The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore the prevalence of cyberbullying within the homeschooling community and the influence that parental attachment security has on the propensity of homeschoolers to either bully or be victimized by bullies, while controlling for religiosity as a confounding variable. Though each of these variables has received attention in literature, their influence among homeschoolers has not been investigated. The homeschooling community has not been the focus of bullying research, which emphasizes the importance of addressing this gap.

The rest of this chapter provides a detailed explanation of the approach to address this gap, including choice of research design, methods, population, sampling procedures, instrumentation, and data analysis. Each of these is supported with the rationale behind their selection. Finally, ethical considerations and threats to validity are outlined.

Research Design and Rationale

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the prevalence of cyberbullying within the homeschooling community, the nature of parental attachment in homeschooled families, and the influence that parental attachment has on the propensity of homeschoolers to either bully or be victimized by bullies. A qualitative approach was considered, as it can provide a more detailed individualized experience from a smaller sample size, but the importance of generalizing the data to a broader population

eliminated this approach. An experimental design, while offering the opportunity to identify attachment and relational patterns in a controlled environment, was deemed inappropriate due to the reliance of this study on historical data. A mixed-methods design utilizing a survey method along with qualitative interviewing was considered as well, as it has the potential to provide both the objective information gathered through a standardized approach and an increased understanding of the subjective experience of participants, but this approach was discarded as it would shift the scope of this study beyond concrete correlation and realistic time constraints. The presence of three variables with one being held constant (religiosity) merited the use of a partial correlation analysis.

The data collection involved online surveys, facilitating quick and accessible data collection from students covering a wide geographic area. As the focus of this study was the correlation of attachment pattern and bullying or victimization during adolescence, a cross-sectional design allowed historical data collection focused on students' experience during their adolescent years. Surveys were self-administered through web-based self-administered questionnaires. This approach had a number of benefits, including limiting the cost and time involved in obtaining the data, increasing the potential sample population through accessibility, and broadening the geographic regions from which participants can be drawn (Creswell, 2009). Despite these strengths, results relied on the integrity of participants to personally complete the surveys and provide accurate data, screening participants was complicated by limited direct interaction, and low response rates can lead to an increase in surveys in which particular items are left unanswered (Umbach, 2005). Despite these potential limitations, self-administered surveys have

historically provided data that have been deemed valid and reliable in understanding certain characteristics of a broad population (Creswell, 2009).

Methodology

Population

The adolescents in this study were homeschooled individuals of ages 14 through 17 who have been homeschooled for at least 2 years. Participants were initially drawn from homeschooling groups throughout the states of New York, Texas, and California. These states are demographically diverse, and each has state-wide homeschooling organizations through which individual homeschooling groups can be contacted. The surveys were then opened to homeschooled adolescents from other states when participant numbers from the original states were not adequate. The required sample size to ensure validity and generalizability was 119.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

This study used a nonprobability method called quota sampling. This approach involves the selection of participants based on specific characteristics and relies on the researcher to find participants who meet these characteristics. The benefits of using a quota sampling included ease of recruitment and focusing on participants with particular characteristics. Recruitment is not as easy as with convenience sampling, but participants within the focus demographic were included solely based on their availability and willingness to participate. This facilitates finding participants but does not prioritize random sampling (Bornstein et al., 2013). As such, generalizability to a broader population is limited. However, the focus on a subgroup will allow for comparisons to be

made to other subgroups or the general population (Bornstein et al., 2013).

The selected demographic for this study focused on age (14-17), schooling (homeschooled), and years homeschooled (at least 2 years). Invitations to participate were sent to homeschooling groups around the country and posted on the homeschooling forum on Reddit r/homeschool. As the participants in this study were minors, a combined invitation and parental consent form presented the opportunity to homeschooling parents. If both parents and their children were interested in participating, parents indicated their consent by providing their adolescent with the link that was included in the parental consent form.

One of the important elements of this study was ensuring an appropriate number of participants to avoid a Type II error. A Type II error involves failing to reject a null hypothesis despite an effect being present (Field, 2013). Combating this potential error involves calculating the minimum number of participants to ensure the intended effects are recognized and can be considered valid. Increasing the sample size limits the effect of outliers and ultimately moves the sample effects closer to the mean (Jackson, 2009). A sample that provides more standardized data can provide results that are considered more reliable. Finding the ideal sample size involved using the power ($1-\beta$), the alpha level (α), and an estimated size of effect (Field, 2013). A power level of .80 is considered sufficient, meaning that there would be an 80% likelihood that an effect was recognized (Cohen, 1992). The alpha level indicates the probability of a Type I error which entails identifying an effect when one is not present. A satisfactory level for alpha is .05, meaning that there is a 5% chance that a Type I error will occur (Field, 2013). The effect

size can be estimated using Cohen's f^2 recommendations of .05 for a medium effect with a partial correlation analysis, which indicates the difference between the results and the standard deviations from the mean (Field, 2013). The sample size was calculated using G*Power and three variables, producing a required sample size of 119.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Homeschooled students ages of 14–17 were contacted through two avenues. One was through homeschooling groups around the country. Emails were sent to the directors of these groups asking to offer the opportunity to participate to the parents in their groups, keeping in mind the inclusion/exclusion criteria of age and years homeschooled. The second way invitations were provided was through the homeschool forum on Reddit r/homeschool. A combined invitation letter and parental consent form was provided to parents, either through their homeschool groups or on Reddit. Included with the parental consent form was a link to the survey. Parents indicated their consent by providing their child participant with the link and, thereby, access to the survey. Each participant was provided with a description of the study and an assent form at the beginning of the survey. The assent form included information on the anonymity of participants, the voluntary nature of the study, consent through survey submission, and the intended use of results and interpretations. Participants were also provided with information pertaining to the purposes and intent of the study, and voluntary participation and anonymity were reaffirmed. This included information regarding any relevant state laws governing bullying and any legal risks to participants, although the anonymity of participants mitigates legal risks pertaining to data gathering in this study.

No identifying information was gathered through Survey Monkey, but participants were asked to reaffirm their age and willingness to participate. All information resulting from data collection was retrieved and viewed solely by the researcher and securely saved using password- protection.

As this was an anonymous online survey study, it did not involve in-depth debriefing or ongoing assessment. Rather, information for free and/or low-cost state hotlines and counseling agencies were provided should participants experience any distress or discomfort related to participation. While the anonymous nature of the surveys provides a degree of protection and security to participants, resources were made available should any participant wish to follow up, either with the researcher or professional mental health care. As such, contact information for the researchers was provided for any questions or concerns that arise before, during, or after the course of the study.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Concepts

Demographic Questionnaire

The information sought by the demographic questionnaire included gender, age, ethnicity, religious affiliation, number of siblings, parent's marital status, and years homeschooled. Also included were items assessing the nature and amount of peer interaction during their homeschooled years.

The Centrality of Religiosity Scale

The CRS was developed in 2003 with the purpose of identifying the influence of religiosity on personality (Huber & Huber, 2012). It is based off of Charles Glock's

(1962) conception of five code dimensions of religiosity, consisting of intellectual, ideological, ritualistic, experiential, and consequential dimensions. Glock's model was further refined by eliminating the consequential dimension and separating the ritualistic dimension into the two distinct areas of private and public practice (Stark & Glock, 1968).

The original CRS is available in a 15, 10, and 5 item scales. The original 15-item scale (CRS-15) contains three items for each dimension of religiosity and is considered the most valid and reliable (Huber & Huber 2012). Five of the items are rated from 5 (very often) to 1 (never), seven items scale from (5) very much so to (1) not at all, with the remaining three items consisting of variations from (A) several times a day, to (H) never. Each of the items are then coded and applied to the categorizations of 1.0 to 2.0: not religious, 2.1 to 3.9: religious, and 4.0 to 5.0: highly religious.

The CRS has been used in over 100 studies since its conception and has been taken by over 100,000 participants (Huber & Huber, 2012). As such, norms are available for 21 different countries, and it has been thoroughly tested for validity and reliability (Huber & Huber, 2012).

Cyberbullying and Online Aggression Survey Instrument (COASI)

Justin Patchin and Sameer Hinduja, co-founders of the Cyberbullying Research Center, have developed a scale to assess both cyberbullying perpetrating and victimization (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). The scale consists of 18 items, nine assessing victimization and nine assessing offending. Each item is a statement such as "Someone spread rumors about me online" or "Someone threatened to hurt me online" for the

victimization scale, and “I posted a mean or hurtful picture online of someone” or I pretended to be someone else online and acted in a way that was mean or hurtful to them” for the offending scale. Participants select from a continuum of five responses consisting of never (0), once (1), a few times (2), several times (3), and many times (4). These responses are combined for each section of the scale and the resulting score indicates the participants experience with either cyberbullying victimization or cyberbullying perpetrating.

An important element in this inventory is that it does not include data collection concerning experiences with harm or any other effects of bullying or victimization. This will keep participants from being directly forced to consider the current or prior distress they are experiencing or have experienced. Rather, the inventory focuses solely on whether or not cyberbullying has taken place. While this does not serve to entirely protect participants from reliving past harm or being further immersed in their distress, it is an attempt at keeping participant responses factual and non-emotional as possible.

This scale has been used in over 100 schools with over 15,000 participants (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). It has consistently demonstrated strong construct validity and internal reliability, with all factors loading onto one component, and alpha coefficients of .892 and .935 for the victimization and offending scales, respectively (Hamburger et al., 2011).

Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ)

The Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ) was developed in 1987 and is purposed to apply Ainsworth’s (1978) theories of attachment as an inventory for the

adolescent population (Kenny, 1987). The PAQ consists of 55 questions separated into the three scales of Affective Quality of Relationships (27 items), Parents as Facilitators of Independence (14 items), and Parents as Source of Support (13 items) (Kenny & Hart, 1992). Participants respond according to a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). Examples of items include "In general, my parents are sensitive to my feelings and needs", "In general, my parents treat me like a younger child", "During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons I tried to ignore", and "When I have a serious problem or an important decision to make I know my family will know what to do".

The PAQ has been found internally reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .88 for each of the Parents as Facilitators of Independence and Parents as Source of Support, and a Cronbach's alpha of .96 for the Affective Quality of Attachment scale (Kenny, 1990; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991). The validity of the PAQ has been further ascertained through its correlation with similar instruments. Various scales of the Moos Family Environment Scale (FES; Moos, 1985) have been correlated with the PAQ, including between the FES Cohesion and the PAQ Affective Quality of Relationships ($r=.51$, $p<.01$), between the FES Cohesion and the Parents as Source of Support ($r=.45$, $p<.01$), and between PAQ Parents as Facilitators of Independence and the FES Expressiveness, FES Independence ($r=.33$, $p<.01$), and FES Control scales ($r=-.40$, $p<.01$; r=).

Data Analysis Plan

The results of the online surveys were downloaded from the website SurveyMonkey and kept on a secure password-protected hard-drive on a desktop

computer. Surveys that had been submitted but were missing results to some items from the inventories were omitted from the study. Surveys missing items from the demographic survey were not omitted, provided the participants were not disqualified due to inclusion/exclusion parameters. All data was also analyzed for any outliers using IBM SPSS. Surveys with extreme outliers and missing data were considered for omission, depending on the nature of the outlier and the missing data.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistics was conducted and provided population descriptors and means and standard deviations for the dependent, independent, and control variables. SPSS was used to evaluate the various assumptions that were made, including normality, linearity, collinearity, and homoscedascity (Field, 2013). The main analysis was done as a partial correlation. A partial correlation allows a researcher to examine the relationship between two variables when a third variable has a potential influence (Field, 2013). The third variable is held constant, allowing an uninhibited view of the two primary variables. In this case, the first variable was parental attachment, the second was experiences with cyberbullying and victimization, and the third variable being held constant was religiosity. The goal was to ensure that any correlation between parental attachment and cyberbullying perpetration and victimization was examined without the effect of religiosity on either variable, particularly as religiosity is high among homeschoolers and shares a common influence with parental attachment. Using IBM SPSS, any influence that religiosity had on either of the primary variables was relegated.

One potential concern was that there would not be enough participants with a

range of results in religiosity to adequately analyze religiosity's influence. When this was encountered, additional participants were sought using a different approach, such as targeting either religious or non-religious homeschooling groups, depending on the nature of the issue.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1:

What is the prevalence of cyberbullying among homeschooled adolescents when compared to traditionally schooled students?

H10: Rates of cyberbullying within the homeschooled population equal or surpass the rates of cyberbullying within the traditionally schooled population.

H1a: Rates of cyberbullying within the homeschooled population are significantly below the rates of cyberbullying within the traditionally schooled population.

Research Question 2:

What is the relationship between parental attachment security and the rates of cyberbullying and victimization among homeschooled adolescents when controlling for religiosity?

H20: Homeschooled adolescents with higher parental attachment security as indicated by the PAQ are less likely to engage in cyberbullying and be victimized by cyberbullying.

H2a: Homeschooled adolescents with lower parental attachment security as indicated by the PAQ are more likely to engage in cyberbullying and be victimized by cyberbullying.

Threats to Validity

There were several important elements related to external and internal validity to consider with the design of this study. External validity relates to the generalizability of results, which can be complex depending on the methodology and population (Creswell, 2009). As this study was conducted using an anonymous one-time administration of an online survey, several threats to validity was minimized. The lack of a treatment or ongoing course of treatments limits the potential of detrimental interactions with other treatments, participants, or historical effects (Creswell, 2009). Although specific homeschooling groups were targeted, they were numerous and diverse in their geography, further limiting the interaction of participants. Nevertheless, it is possible that homeschoolers from the same groups and geographic areas participated and influenced each other, and this needs to be considered (Creswell, 2009). Another important fact is that the participants were volunteers, which raises the possibility that certain inherent characteristics skewed generalizability toward a population with such characteristics. These threats to external validity necessitated caution when applying results to a broad population.

Internal validity involves experimental experiences that might impact results, such as changes over time, participant dropouts, selection of participants, score regression, and communication between participants (Creswell, 2009). These threats to internal validity were greatly minimized through the use of a one-time survey, as any concerns related to the use of a treatment or changes over time were negated.

Threats to construct and statistical conclusion validity were considered as well.

Construct validity concerns occur when variables and measures are poorly defined or implemented (Creswell, 2009). Combating these threats was done by using definitions and measures that have been thoroughly researched and validated over the course of numerous studies. Statistical conclusion validity involves researchers incorrectly interpreting results due to improper use of statistical procedures or allowing for too much manipulation of results through weak statistical assumptions (Creswell, 2009). To counter this possibility, appropriate statistical tests were used, and the resulting data was interpreted with the understanding that Type-I and Type-2 errors can result from misinterpretation (Garcia-Perez, 2012).

Ethical Procedures

There were a number of important ethical considerations in conducting this research. The nature of the study, anonymity of participants, and rights of participants to withdraw at any time needed to be clearly conveyed. The intended use of the data was clearly outlined, including the fact that the participants were not required to have any further interaction with the researcher or any other party who might be interested in following up or addressing concerns. However, unaffiliated third parties counseling centers or state mental health agencies were made available if participants experienced any distress or discomfort at any point in the process. The contact information of the researcher was provided for any questions or concerns any participants might have. The entire research study proposal was submitted to the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), which scrutinized the proposed approach for potential ethical considerations and approved the study (IRB#: 09-22-21-0387184).

The use of minors and the focus on cyberbullying warranted special attention. Parental consent was procured prior to the involvement of any minors. Student participants were included only through parental consent. Parental consent was affirmed by parents providing a link to the survey to their children. The survey began with a student assent form that informed participants of their rights to withdraw at any time, their agreement to participle through submission without signature, that they have received notification of relevant state laws regarding bullying, that there will be no researcher follow-up or debriefing due to anonymity, and that parent and student have to access the researcher for questions, concerns, and referral to mental health professionals. It is important to note that no questions in this survey addressed the current or past mental health of participants. Regardless, extensive referrals for local free or low-cost mental health services were provided. The inventories being used gathered only the data required to assess the areas of cyberbullying perpetration, parental attachment, and religiosity, and each inventory was brief as to maintain a narrow focus on data vital to the study. The anonymity of the data helped maintain security and privacy, and data was only accessible by the researcher. Any data that was downloaded from the web site was kept in a secure, password-protected hard drive.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological characteristics of this study exploring the relationship between the independent variable of parental attachment and the dependent variable of cyberbullying perpetration or victimization while controlling for a potential confounding variable of religiosity. The choice of a partial correlation was

explained and rational was provided. The inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation was outlined, and methods of inviting and obtaining assent were discussed, including methods to ensure anonymity. Statistical procedures to calculate the sample size, descriptive statistics, and the partial correlation were outlined. This included the approach to evaluate the statistical assumptions that were made. The rationale for the use of certain statistical procedures for data analysis were included. Finally, threats to validity and ethical procedures were summarized. Chapter 4 will provide detailed information on the data collected and the statistical analyses that were performed.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the prevalence of cyberbullying within the homeschooled community and the influence that parental attachment security has on the propensity of homeschoolers to either bully or be victimized by bullies, while controlling for religiosity as a confounding variable. As neither cyberbullying nor parental attachment had been studied among homeschoolers, I investigated whether homeschoolers bully or are bullied more or less than traditionally schooled students, and what, if any, statistical relationship exists between the rates of cyberbullying and cybervictimization, and the strength of parental attachment security. This chapter details the data collection process, including collection time frame, approach to participant recruitment, participation rates, and methods of data collection. The results of the data analysis are provided, including descriptive statistics and an in-depth analysis of the statistical procedures.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred over the course of 14 months, from June 2021 until July 2022. Participants were invited through homeschooling groups found advertising on social media. Group leaders were contacted with an invitation letter and provided with additional details if requested. Initially, invitations went to groups in California, New York, and Texas. After 8 weeks of limited response, invitations were expanded to other states as well. The invitations included a web link to Survey Monkey with the three questionnaires assessing variables for the study and a demographic questionnaire. Over the course of 14 months, various adjustments were made to expand participation,

including broadening the age range of participants from 14–17 to 12–17, expanding the geographic area of invitation, and using social media to advertise the study. Ultimately, 94 people visited the survey with 77 fully completing all questionnaires, 11 consenting to participate but not answering any questions, and six beginning the survey but completing only a portion of the questions. These 17 individuals were eliminated from the study with the remaining 77 forming the sample used in data analysis. As this number is less than the recommended sample size of 119, it was necessary to consult with the dissertation committee concerning continuing data collection. After 14 months the decision was made to end collection, as the estimated time span to find the remaining 42 participants would most likely have been an unacceptable length of time.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Demographic information of participants is displayed in Table 1. Participants were homeschooled students between the ages of 12–17 from around the United States. The population was largely from two regions, with 30 participants from the mid-Atlantic region of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York and 39 from the South Atlantic region of Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Washington DC, and West Virginia. The gender of participants leaned male with 45 male participants or 58%. The population skewed young, with 48 being 12–13. Ethnicity was 74% White, 7.8% Black or African American, 10.4% Hispanic or Latino, and 7.8% Asian or Asian-American. The estimated ethnicities of American homeschoolers are 62% White, 16% Hispanic or Latino, 14% Black, 1% Asian, and 7%

two or more races and other races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023), indicating that the sample population skews White, while the Hispanic or Latino, and Black populations are underrepresented.

Table 1

Characteristics of Sample (N = 77)

Characteristic	*n*	%
Gender		
Male	45	58.4
Female	32	41.6
Ethnicity		
White	57	74.0
Black or African American	6	7.8
Hispanic or Latino	8	10.4
Asian or Asian American	6	7.8
Age		
12	24	31.2
13	24	31.2
14	11	14.3
15	10	13.0
16	6	7.8
17	2	2.6

To ascertain the prevalence of cyberbullying and victimization among homeschoolers, the scores for the victimization and offending portions of the Cyberbullying and Online Aggression Survey Instrument (COAS) were scored as separate dichotomies according to the scale's author's direction, which simplifies responses into having cyberbullied or having experienced victimization. Results are provided in Table 2. Among this sample, 15 homeschoolers indicated having been victimized, five being male and 10 being female. Three participants indicated having bullied others for a total of 3.9%, with two being female (2.6%) and one being male (1.3%).

Table 2

Cyberbullying Rates of Victimization and Offending (N = 77)

Characteristic	*n*	%
Victimization		
Female	10	13.0
Male	5	6.5
Total	15	19.5
Offending		
Female	2	2.6
Male	1	1.3
Total	3	3.9

The means and standard deviations of the PAQ, Cyberbullying Offending and Victimization Scale, and CRS-15 are included in Table 3. Research using the PAQ with high school students has yielded means and standard deviations of 203.90(34.32). This study indicates that, on average, homeschoolers are significantly more securely attached (M = 217.56, SE = 3.92) than traditionally schooled American adolescents (M = 203.90, SE = 2.03) (Hannum & Dvorak, 2004; Tanner, 2018). This difference is significant and represents a medium-sized effect, d = .43. This study indicates that, on average, homeschooled adolescents are similarly religious (M = 49.44, SE = 1.99) to traditionally schooled adolescents (M = 49.11, SE = .76). This difference is not significant; however, it did represent a small-sized effect, d = .22. Finally, the victimization portion of this study showed a mean of 1.88, which is higher than the mean and standard deviation of the current study at 0.68(1.59). The offending portion had a mean of 0.33, which is higher than the current study's mean and standard deviation of 0.09(0.52).

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Variables (N = 77)

Questionnaire	*M*	*SD*
PAQ	217.56	34.43
CRS-15	49.44	17.50
COAS(Victim)	0.68	1.59
COAS(Offend)	0.09	0.52

Statistical Assumptions

Ensuring a valid and reliable partial correlation has been performed requires the assessment of a set of statistical assumptions. These assumptions confirm that the model and statistical approach being used can be interpreted to address the research questions and hypotheses (Field, 2013). One such assumption is that the sample size is sufficient for outcomes to be generalized to the population. A power analysis was conducted using the power analysis software G*Power. The sample size for this partial correlation, using one independent variable (parental attachment), one dependent variable (cyberbullying), and one control variable (religiosity), was calculated using a power level of .80, an alpha level of .05, and an effect size of f 2 = .05. The minimum sample size for such a study was set at 119. As previously discussed, the acquired sample of 77 did not meet the recommended minimum of 119.

Conducting a partial correlation also requires the assumptions of normality, additivity, and linearity. The scores for the independent variable PAQ were analyzed and obtained a score of -.928 for skewness and 3.99 for kurtosis, indicating that there is moderate skewness and slight kurtosis. However, numbers higher than +1 and lower than -1 are considered nonnormal and the numbers obtained for PAQ remained in normal

levels (Hart et al., 2017). Similarly, the scores of the control variable CRS were analyzed and found to be -.565 for skewness and -.995 for kurtosis. These scores are once again within acceptable ranges. Normalcy was further examined using scatterplots as exhibited in Figures 1 and 2. As can be seen, observed scores are generally following the expected cumulative probability for each.

Figure 1

P-P Plot of Independent and Control Variables for PAQ

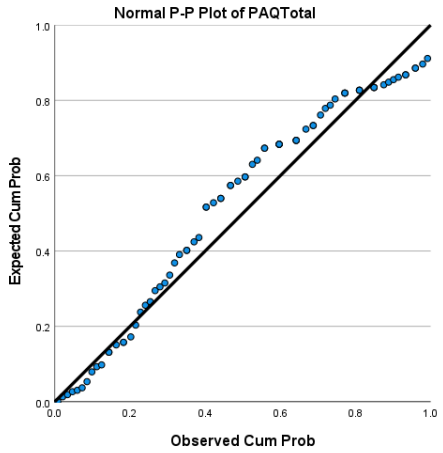
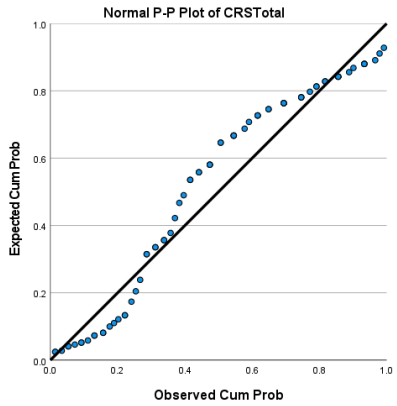


Figure 2

P-P Plot of Independent and Control Variables for CRS



Reported rates of cyberbullying varies greatly in the literature, recently ranging from 15.5% to 45.5% in victimization and 6% to 41% in perpetration (Zhu et al., 2021), making it difficult to ascertain with any specificity the rates of cyberbullying within the general school-aged population. However, a review of 74 studies on cyberbullying found a mean of 21% victimization and 15% perpetration (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Using these numbers, the rates of 3.9% perpetration fall significantly below the estimated 15% in the general population. However, the rate of 19.5% victimization among homeschoolers in this study comes much closer to the estimated national rate of 21%.

Other assumptions that must be addressed are those of additivity and linearity. Assuming additivity and linearity means that it can be reasonably concluded that the outcome of the study is related linearly to the predictors and each independent variable will have an additive effect on the dependent variable (Field, 2013). For this study, the relationship between parental attachment and both cyberbullying offending and cyberbullying victimization are assumed to be linear. To test this, two analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted using parental attachment as the independent variable and either cyberbullying offending or cyberbullying victimization as the dependent. Results can be seen in Tables 4 and 5. As a 95% confidence interval was used and the value for sig. Deviation from Linearity is >.05 in each case, indicating that the relationship between the independent and dependent variable is linearly dependent (Field, 2013).

Table 4

COS and PAQ Between Groups Linearity

	SS	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
Combined	11.61	54	.21	.54*	.97
Linearity	.44	1	.44	1.10*	.31
Deviation from Linearity	11.17	53	.21	.53*	.9

*p < .05

Table 5

CVS and PAQ Between Groups Linearity

	SS	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
Combined	154.88	54	2.87	1.66*	.10
Linearity	4.26	1	4.26	2.46*	.13
Deviation from Linearity	150.63	53	2.84	1.65*	.10

*p < .05

Main Analyses

Research Question 1

The prevalence of cyberbullying was split into the areas of cyberbullying offending and cyberbullying victimization. The rates of both offending and victimization are illustrated in Table 6. Out of 77 participants, 3.9% admitted to bullying others and 19.5% admitted to being bullied.

Table 6

Rates of Cyberbullying Offending and Victimization

Cyberbully Participation	N	%
Bullied Others	3	3.9
Did Not Bully Others	74	96.1
Victimized	15	19.5
Not Victimized	62	80.5

Research Question 2

To determine the relationship between parental attachment and the rates of cyberbullying victimization or offending while controlling for religiosity, a first-order partial correlation was conducted. Results indicated that, on average, homeschoolers are significantly more securely attached (M = 217.56, SE = 3.92) than traditionally schooled American adolescents (M = 203.90, SE = 2.03; Hannum & Dvorak, 2004; Tanner, 2018). This difference, -13.66, is significant t(279) = -3.34, p = <.001, and represents a medium-sized effect, d = .43. However, there is no significant relationship between parental attachment and cyberbullying offending when controlling for religiosity, r = -.099, p = .394. There is also no significant relationship between parental attachment and cyberbullying victimization when controlling for religiosity, r = .040, p = .731. Additionally, the high significance levels indicate that even the small effect that does seemingly exist could be attributed to chance and is not necessarily influenced by the independent variable. Thus, any increases or decreases in one variable does not necessarily correlate to corresponding increases or decreases in the other variable.

Summary and Transition

This study took place through the participation of 77 homeschooled students between the ages of 12 and 17 who fully completed online surveys consisting of a demographic questionnaire, the PAQ, CRS, and COAS. The COAS was used to compare the rates of cyberbullying victimization and offending among homeschoolers to the population of traditionally schooled adolescents. This analysis found that homeschoolers

are much less likely to cyberbully others and slightly less likely to be cyberbullied. The broader analysis of whether parental attachment is related to cyberbullying victimization and offending while controlling for religiosity was conducted using a partial correlation. These analyses revealed that parental attachment has a small, insignificant effect on both cyberbullying and cybervictimization, indicating that any variation in rates of cyberbullying or cybervictimization among homeschoolers cannot be attributed to or confidently correlated with parental attachment.

Chapter 5 elaborates on these results through interpretation. More in-depth analysis and comparison is conducted on the rates of cyberbullying and cybervictimization, using data of traditionally schooled students using existing literature, and homeschooled students using data from this study. The findings concerning parental attachment and cyberbullying and cybervictimization are considered using a theoretical framework and existing literature. Finally, limitations that could have influenced results are examined, and the potential impact of these results are clarified.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore the prevalence of cyberbullying within the homeschooling community and the influence that parental attachment security has on the propensity of homeschoolers to either bully or be victimized by bullies while controlling for religiosity as a confounding variable. This study was designed to fill a gap in the literature that has yet to address the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying or the potential influences of parental attachment and religiosity as protective or deleterious factors. To ascertain the prevalence of cyberbullying and victimization among homeschoolers (Research Question 1), the COAS was used. Results indicated that 15 homeschoolers out of 77 had been victimized over the past 30 days, and three out of the 77 homeschoolers reported cyberbullying others over the past 30 days. To determine the relationship between parental attachment and the rates of cyberbullying victimization or offending while controlling for religiosity (Research Question 2), a first-order partial correlation was conducted. Results indicated that there was not a significant relationship between parental attachment and cyberbullying when controlling for religiosity among the homeschool participants. Similarly, there was no significant relationship between parental attachment and cybervictimization when controlling for religiosity among homeschoolers. The results of this study support and inform the homeschooled community as it seeks to cultivate a safe environment conducive to learning and maturation.

This chapter provides an interpretation of the results in Chapter 4 using existing literature and a framework of attachment theory. In addition, the limitations inherent in

this study are explored. Finally, potential contributions to positive social change and recommendations for further research are considered.

Interpretation of the Findings

Although cyberbullying among traditionally schooled American adolescents has been extensively researched (Alhajji et al., 2019; Grinshteyn et al., 2017; Khurana et al., 2015; Patchin & Hinduja, 2022; Reed et al., 2018), cyberbullying among and toward homeschoolers has received limited attention. This study addressed this gap in the literature by providing prevalence estimates of cyberbullying (3.9%) and victimization (19.5%) perpetrated by or experienced by homeschoolers. These rates were compared to cyberbullying and victimization rates from traditionally schooled adolescents, which were found through a meta-review of 74 studies revealing a mean of approximately 15% for cyberbullying and 21% for victimization (Hinduja & Patchin, 2022). The 3.9% rate of cyberbullying committed by homeschoolers in this study was significantly lower than the average 15% rate reported among traditionally schooled adolescents, whereas the 19.5% rate of victimization came much closer to the estimated 21% rate among traditionally schooled adolescents.

The second purpose of this study was to explore the influence of parental attachment and religiosity on the victimization and offending rates found within the homeschooling population. Parental attachment theory has been correlated with numerous aspects of adolescent social relating, indicating that adolescents who are insecurely attached lack interpersonal sensitivity and display heightened aggression toward their peers (Innamorati et al., 2018; Plexousakis et al., 2019). Securely attached

adolescents have demonstrated higher degrees of resilience in teenagers (Jones & Morris, 2012; Masten & Barnes, 2018), mitigating the effects of adversarial experiences (Masten, 2014; Skinner et al., 2021). Further, the likeliness of cyberbullying and/or victimization among adolescents has a significant negative correlation to the strength of parental attachment (Buck, 2015; Kokkinos, 2013; Nikiforoue et al., 2013). Though this study did identify stronger attachment security, higher rates of religiosity, and lower rates of cyberbullying and cybervictimization in homeschoolers compared to traditionally schooled students, these findings did not provide significant results relating parental attachment to cyberbullying and cybervictimization while controlling for religiosity ($r = -.099$, $p = .394$ for attachment and cyberbullying $r = .040$, $p = .731$ for attachment and victimization). However, only three participants reported having cyberbullied others and 15 reported being cyberbullied, which did not produce enough variation to make meaningful correlations between their experiences of bullying others and parental attachment or religiosity.

Limitations

There are several limitations to consider in interpreting the results of this study. Participants were part of a convenience sample. They were invited to participate either by messaging homeschool groups around the country or by posting an invitation on a Reddit homeschooling forum. Thus, participants were volunteers who may have been more inclined to take and complete surveys, increasing the likelihood of self-selection bias. The sensitive nature of some of the questions regarding cyberbullying, religiosity, or their relationships with their primary caregivers could inhibit participation from those who

experience a higher degree of anxiety when addressing such topics. As such, homeschoolers who have had traumatic experiences with cyberbullying, religious engagement, or their primary caregiver relationship might avoid the survey seeking to diminish their own anxiety. In addition, the use of social media targets a participation pool of those who are more likely to be online and part of an online community, potentially influencing the gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status of the pool. Thus, the sample cannot be assumed to be reflective of the ethnic and gender composition of the general population.

Online surveys present challenges in participation rates and population distribution. They do not allow for the exploration of thoughts and ideas in the same manner as personal interviews. The lack of control complicates monitoring the environment or outside influences. It is impossible to ensure that the survey was taken alone, and it is possible that parents, family members, or friends had input into the responses. Without personal oversight by an administrator, there is an increased potential for errant or incomplete responses.

Ultimately, 94 people opened the SurveyMonkey survey link, with 77 fully completing all questionnaires, 11 consenting to participate without answering any questions, and six beginning the survey but only completing a portion of the questions. These 17 individuals were eliminated from the study with the remaining 77 forming the sample used in data analysis. The number of participants did not reach the recommended sample size of 119.

Lack of participation in this study impacted the analysis and interpretation of the

data. Only three participants reported having bullied others, complicating correlations between parental attachment and cyberbully offending due to the lack of variable data within the sample size. Limited participation has been an ongoing issue with homeschooling research, with most research being done with small convenience samples more suitable for qualitative study (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). However, qualitative studies do not provide generalizability and the resulting data is used to find trends rather than being used for statistical analysis. The intention of providing a descriptive analysis of cyberbullying within the homeschooled population warranted the use of a quantitative approach. This necessitated procuring a larger population sample, which was difficult. States have adopted a passive approach to registration and record keeping for homeschoolers, which inhibits easily finding large groups of homeschooled students (Carlson, 2020; Marks & Welsch, 2019). Locating state and regional homeschooling groups was difficult, with the groups that were found tending to be voluntary, non-profit, and private. The few major organizations that were contacted refused to participate without inhibitory advertising fees. Ultimately social media was used, which facilitated personal contact with homeschooling parents and leaders of smaller, local groups. However, homeschooling parents and group leaders expressed several concerns in allowing their adolescents to participate. Several homeschool group leaders were suspicious of a survey involving homeschooling adolescents with the inclusion of religious, parenting, and bullying material. They attributed their reluctance to experiences of hostility and suspicion from the public, both regarding their decision to remove their children from public schools and their Christian faith. One comment from a

homeschooling group leader was “I think in the current social and political climate, Christian homeschool parents are afraid to put much out there publicly because they feel like Christianity is being attacked at every turn.” Other parents and leaders pointed to current media publications that have targeted both homeschooling and Christianity as irresponsible and potentially dangerous. If these group leaders’ sentiment is shared by a significant percentage of Christian homeschoolers, it could have influenced the lack of participation rates in this study.

Data analysis was conducted with the understanding that there will be certain limitations to the results and interpretations. In order to correlate parental attachment with either cyberbullying or cybervictimization, the scores for parental attachment would have to be used for each participant who either cyberbullied others or was victimized, rather than the entire sample. The parental attachment data from participants who did not engage in cyberbullying or were victimized by cyberbullies would not be helpful in determining correlates between parental attachment and cyberbullies or cyberbullying victims. There was not enough variance in the three participants who engaged in cyberbullying others to determine correlates. In addition, such a small sample excludes the use of bootstrapping, which repeatedly takes random samples from the sample and develops a normal set of data as the repetition develops a large enough sample to be considered normal (Field, 2013). However, the COASI was designed to provide dichotomous, nominal results. These results were correlated using a Spearman’s rank-order correlation with the COASI as categorical data and the PAQ and CRS as continuous data. The results were similarly insignificant due to the limited participants.

Finally, as the data obtained in this study is correlational, the effects cannot be construed as causal. Any higher or lower rates of cyberbullying or cybervictimization cannot be interpreted as being caused by their associated levels of parental attachment despite the higher rates of attachment security seen among the homeschooled sample. Each of the limitations discussed in this section should be considered when interpreting the results.

Recommendations

The results of this study revealed the importance of exploring parental attachment and cyberbullying within the homeschooling community, leading to numerous opportunities to extend the research. One of the issues that should be addressed is the lack of participation. The low number participants in this study presented the greatest challenge in presenting novel, impactful results and interpretations. Replicating this study with a larger and broader population would provide more complete data to make correlational interpretations and increase generalizability. Researchers should attempt to elicit the participation of a sample that represents the general gender and ethnic constitution of the homeschooling population, that being 62% White, 16% Hispanic or Latino, 14% Black, 1% Asian, and 7% two or more races and other races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). The demographics from the present study was 74% White, 7.8% Black, 10.4% Hispanic or Latino, and 7.8% Asian or Asian-American. In addition, further research would benefit from a more controllable and personal method of data collection, as online surveys do not provide a means for follow-up or more in-depth information gathering, as discussed in the limitations. A qualitative approach could provide a more in-depth and tailored personal narrative attending to considerations such as homeschoolers'

experiences with cyberbullying, information regarding the source or target of cyberbullying, the sources of support for victims, and the nature of protective factors or vulnerabilities.

This study did not facilitate ascertaining the correlation between parental attachment and cyberbullying due to low participation rates. However, results indicated that homeschooled adolescents exhibit a higher degree of both secure attachment and religiosity than traditionally schooled adolescents. Each of these factors have been associated with numerous beneficial characteristics related to mental health, including depression, anxiety, internalizing behaviors, and externalizing behaviors (Spruit et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). The high rates of secure parental attachment in this homeschooled population warrants further exploration. Secure parental attachment has been found to be a significant protective factor in numerous areas of functioning, including diminished aggression (Arim et al., 2009), emotion regulation and social adaptation (Crawford et al., 2007). Literature has well documented the contribution of insecure parental attachment to the propensity for increased behavioral problems (Bureau et al., 2020), diminished emotional regulation, and heightened reactivity to stress (Goffin et al., 2018; Zimmer-Gemback et al., 2017). Anxious attachment has been found particularly detrimental to psychological adjustment after suffering child abuse, contributing to heightened levels of depression and suicidal ideation (Canton-Cortes et al., 2020). Further investigation of the higher attachment security seen in this population could clarify some of the benefits of homeschooling, concerns with public education, or both. In addition, it could help explore the concern that homeschooling is more likely to

foster or harbor abuse due to lack of oversight in the parent-child relationship, as some have suggested (Bartholet, 2020).

This study found a lower rate of cyberbullying and victimization among homeschoolers when compared to traditionally schooled adolescents. The 3.9% rate of cyberbullying others and the 19.5% rate of being victimized showed that these issues exist within the homeschooled population. The presence of cyberbullying, and its correlation to numerous elements of mental distress, should motivate homeschooling parents and group leaders to explore the possibilities of their children cyberbullying others or being victimized. Homeschooling parents can now recognize the existence of this societal problem and implement appropriate protective measures. Parental mediation strategies such as teaching internet safety and monitoring social media usage have been effective in diminishing both cyberbullying and victimization (Aljasir & Alsebaej, 2022). Parents and homeschooling group leaders can collaborate to implement such strategies in their homes and homeschooling communities.

Implications for Social Change

It is estimated that homeschooling increased from about 3.3% of American students in 2016 to 11.1% to begin the 2020-2021 school year. While those numbers have slightly receded as the COVID-19 pandemic has abated, there are still over 5 million school age students being homeschooled, accounting for about 10% of American school-age students (United States Census Bureau, 2021). The results of this current study found that both cyberbullying offending and victimization are present within this population, with offending rates of 3.9% and victimization rates of 19.5%. While the rates of

cyberbullying offending are significantly lower than traditionally schooled students with a rate of 3.9% compared to 15%, the 19.5% rate of victimization among homeschoolers was much closer to the national average of 21%. Recent estimates have 47% of Hispanic teens, 45% of Black teens, and 26% of White teens reporting using at least one of YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, or Facebook almost constantly (Pew Research Center, 2022). Very frequent use of social media has been found to predict poorer mental health outcomes and diminished wellbeing for both boys and girls, with cyberbullying having a strong mediating effect particularly for girls (Viner et al., 2019). The increase in internet usage among adolescents has diminished in-face socialization and exposed previously protected teenagers to a much broader social network (Smith et al., 2021). Parents have identified their number one reason for homeschooling as protecting their children from issues associated with the school environment such as personal safety, exposure to drugs, and negative peer pressure (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The results of the current study reveal that, while they were less likely to cyberbully others, homeschoolers were similarly vulnerable to victimization when compared to traditionally schooled students. The increase in social media usage, exposure to outside influences, and the rates of cyberbullying, along with the increase in homeschooling in the United States in recent years, highlights the importance of addressing the lack of information on cyberbullying among homeschoolers in the scientific literature.

This study provides homeschooling adolescents and their caregivers with information that can inform their approach to safeguarding their families. Peer cybervictimization can have a significant impact on internalizing symptoms such as

depression and emotional distress, but these internalizing symptoms can also predict future peer cybervictimization, leading to a potential cycle of traumatic experience and mental distress (Christina et al., 2021). Both cyberbullying and cybervictimization have significant positive correlations with externalizing symptoms such as outward aggression, academic achievement, and hyperactivity (Kim et al., 2021; Longobardi et al., 2020). Parents seeking to avoid or end these adverse effects for their children can educate their children on safe social media usage and provide guidance and boundaries regarding the time spent on devices and the different sites and apps that are allowed (Ghosh et al., 2018). Further, fostering open communication and a warm, positive parent-child relationship can diminish the likelihood of cybervictimization and mediate the effects should cyberbullying occur (Elsaesser et al., 2017; Zych et al., 2017). These steps can contribute to creating a safe environment that maintains the healthy elements of social media usage including, but not limited to, increasing connectivity and reducing isolation (O'Reilly, 2020), facilitating the detection and admission of mental illness (Michikyan, 2019), and encouraging the online pursuit of mental health services (Rensburg et al., 2015), while limiting the potential detrimental elements of social media usage outlined above.

his study also provides valuable information that can support the implementation of governmental and societal policies and directives intended to diminish cyberbullying and its effects. There are numerous efforts to curb the prevalence of cyberbullying such as the implementation of state and federal cyberbullying laws, response of law enforcement, and government web sites such as www.stopbullying.gov. Most states

require school districts to implement bullying policies and regulations, and some states require that teachers receive professional development in bullying prevention. The issue is that many states address bullying and cyberbullying through the school districts. Students who are homeschooled may not benefit from the district's oversight. The results of this study clearly show the importance of considering homeschooled adolescents in cyberbullying prevention and treatment. There are both governmental endeavors and numerous nonprofits seeking to diminish cyberbullying. These organizations can include homeschoolers in their prevention and treatment strategies.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between parental attachment, religiosity, cyberbullying offending, and cyberbullying victimization within and toward homeschooled adolescents. Data was collected anonymously through an online survey and 77 participants of ages 14-17 fully completed three inventories consisting of the PAQ for attachment security, the CRS for religiosity, and the COASI for cyberbullying offending and victimization. A partial correlation was conducted exploring the relationship between attachment security and either offending or victimization while controlling for religiosity. Cyberbullying rates in the homeschooled population were found to be lower than traditionally schooled adolescents for both offending and victimization but still at a level warranting attention from parents, students, and community. Results from the independent inventories indicated that homeschooled adolescents report higher levels of attachment security and religiosity, but the partial correlation indicated no significant correlation between cyberbullying offending or

victimization and attachment security when controlling for religiosity.

The results of this study provided new information regarding the existence and prevalence of cyberbullying within the homeschooled population. This information can support parents' endeavors to protect their child from cyberbullying throughout their development, as well as ensure that their children are not bullying others in an online environment. Both parents and homeschooling communities can develop strategies tailored to educate their children in online safety, as well as more closely guide their social media usage. Finally, governmental and societal policies directed at addressing and preventing cyberbullying can include homeschoolers in their considerations.

This study provides new information about the attachment security and religiosity of homeschooled adolescents. To this point, no data has been available on either attachment security or religiosity with homeschooled adolescents. Each of these factors have been associated with numerous protective and beneficial elements that contribute to mental health and optimal living, potentially providing considerations for mental health professionals when assessing protective factors and strengths in individuals who are/were homeschooled. Further, variables contributing to the elevated rates of attachment security and religiosity that are more prevalent within homeschooled families can be explored and potentially implemented in families with traditionally schooled children. These qualities warrant further inspection and present opportunities for further research regarding the relationships between parental attachment, religiosity, and cyberbullying.

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Appendix A: Invitation Letter

Dear Invitee,

My name is Jason King, and I am a doctoral candidate in Walden University's Clinical Psychology program. I am looking for potential participants for a research study on homeschooled students exploring the relationship between parental attachment, cyberbullying, and religious engagement. Unfortunately, cyberbullying among homeschoolers is a subject that has received little to no attention. As a former homeschooler and current homeschooling parent, I see the importance of addressing a subject that has the potential to do tremendous harm. As people spend more and more time online through social media and other online interactions, the likelihood of having unpleasant or outright dangerous encounters increases.

There are only a couple of prerequisites for this study, that participants must be 14-17 years old and have been homeschooled for at least two years. The study is conducted entirely through online surveys and is estimated to take approximately 1 hour. There will be no names or other identifying information taken, participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and any information that is collected was strictly confidential. Parental consent is required, and additional confirmation of willing participation was included in the survey for the adolescent.

All states have laws governing bullying. Please be aware that people who bully others could be breaking the law and be prosecutable under their state's laws. For information on your state's bullying laws, please visit [redacted] and select your state.

Allowing your child to participate will provide great assistance in aiding the fastest growing educational sector of homeschoolers. Further, I appreciate your assistance in completing my degree. To protect your child's identity, no consent signature or names will be requested at any time. If you agree to your child taking these surveys, please review the following consent information and forward your child the link to the survey at the bottom of the consent form. Providing your child with access to the survey will serve as an indication of your consent to their participation. Thank you!

Sincerely,
Jason King M.A., M.S.
Ph.D. Candidate
Walden University

Appendix B: Debriefing Page

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research. All of the information you have provided is anonymous and will remain strictly confidential.

If participating in this study has produced or every produces any emotional distress, please take advantage of a licensed mental health provider or hospitals in your area. Please either contact your insurance provider for a list of participating providers or utilize a web database such as www.GoodTherapy.org

If you have any further questions about this study or your participation therein, please feel free to contact me anonymously through my email address.

Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire

The data obtained through these surveys can be influenced by many different characteristics. This questionnaire seeks to provide additional information that can be considered when analyzing the results. Please answer the following questions thoroughly by checking the appropriate answers. As a reminder, participants are entirely anonymous, and any data collected will remain confidential.

Gender

_____ Male _____ Female

Age

_____ 14 _____ 15
_____ 16 _____ 17

Ethnicity

_____ Caucasian _____ Asian/ Pacific Islander
_____ Black or African American _____ Hispanic/Latino
_____ Native American _____ Other

Religious Affiliation

_____ Catholic _____ Protestant
_____ Other Christian _____ Jewish
_____ Muslim _____ Hindu
_____ Atheist/Agnostic _____ Other
_____ None

Number of Siblings

_____ 1 _____ 2
_____ 3 _____ 4 or more

Size of Homeschooling Group

_____ under 10 students _____ 10-25 students
_____ 25-50 students _____ more than 50 students
_____ I am not in a homeschooling group

Years Homeschooled

_____ 2 _____ 3
_____ 4 _____ 5
_____ 6 or more

State of Residence

_____ Texas _____ California
_____ New York _____ Other

Which of the following social media websites do you currently have an account with? (Check all that apply)

_____ Facebook _____ Twitter _____ Instagram _____ Snapchat
_____ TikTok _____ Reddit _____ Tumblr

How many friends do you have on social media?

_____ 1-5 _____ 5-10 _____ 10-25
_____ 25-50 _____ 50-100 _____ Over 100

How often do you check-in to your social media accounts in any given week?

_____ Daily _____ Every other day _____ Every two days
_____ Every three days _____ Once a week _____ Every hour

How much time do you spend on social media each week?

_____ Less than 1 hour _____ 2-3 hours _____ 3-5 hours
_____ 5-12 hours _____ More than 12 hours

What device(s) do you use to access social media? (Check all that apply)

_____ Desktop _____ Laptop _____ Phone
_____ Tablet _____ Video game device

How often do you use the chat app on your social media accounts?

_____ Extremely often _____ Very often _____ Moderately often
_____ Slightly often _____ Not at all

Appendix D: Permission for use of the CSR

Dear Jason

I give you the permission for using the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS) in your study. Enclosed you find information – including scoring – about CRS-15.

I'm interested in the findings of your research. So, I would be glad, if you send me your thesis as pdf after you've finished it.

Best regards,

Stefan

RELIGIONS: Special Issue "Research with the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS)" – Call for Papers: https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/CRS

Prof. Dr. Stefan Huber

Director of the Institute for "Empirical Research on Religion"

University of Berne

Switzerland

Appendix E: Permission for use of the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ)

BOSTON COLLEGE

Dear Colleague:

You have my permission to reproduce and use the Parental Attachment Questionnaire for research purposes. Please send me a copy of your findings to include in the compendium of studies using the PAQ.

Sincerely,

Maureen Kenny

Maureen Kenny, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Counseling, Developmental
Psychology and Research Methods
Boston College

Appendix F: Permission for use of the Cyberbullying and Online Aggression Survey Instrument (COASI)

Hi Jason,
Thanks for reaching out. You are welcome to use our instrument. See attached for the most recent version. Let me know if you have any questions.

All the best with your research.

Justin

Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D.

Co-director, Cyberbullying Research Center
Professor of Criminal Justice
Department of Political Science
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Eau Claire, WI 54701
http://www.cyberbullying.org/