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## Adolescent Cyberbullying Program Experiences of White Rural Males

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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Lonnie L. Erskine

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University

2022

Abstract

Adolescent Cyberbullying Program Experiences of White Rural Males

by

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MS, Walden University, 2013

BS, Pennsylvania State University, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human & Social Services

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## Abstract

Technology has become a gateway to use aggression against others. Cyberbullying is an ongoing problem, often causing severe mental, physical, and emotional issues. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the experiences of White rural males between the ages of 18–30 who experienced cyberbullying prevention and intervention programs when they were between the ages of 15–18. The research question directly addressed this purpose. Prevention and intervention can be powerful if utilized correctly, providing adolescents with assistance, safety, and assurance to cope with cyberbullying effectively. Vygotsky’s social development theory guided this study. Eight individuals participated in semistructured interviews. Derived themes that answered the research question were: (a) importance of personal experiences in understanding of cyberbullying; (b) there are negative outcomes of cyberbullying; (c) inadequacy of cyberbullying prevention/intervention programs; (d) ongoing adult support is important; and (e) schools are important & need to improve their approach to cyberbullying prevention. These results may provide principals, teachers, counselors, and parents with information that can help them prevent and intervene with cyberbullying.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Chris, and our four beautiful children, Savannah, Cody, Isabella, and Noah. Your understanding, unconditional love, support, and encouragement while pursuing my degree have been incredible. I could not have done this without you all. Chris, thank you for encouraging me to continue, you are my rock, my strength, and my light, without you guiding me and encouraging me I could not have finished. To God, for providing me with the strength and courage to continue my education. To my father, who passed away before I could finish, thank you, Dad, for your encouragement and belief in me. My mother for always telling me that I could do anything if I set my mind to it. Well Mom, I did it. I persevered and completed my dreams. To those who have experienced cyberbullying victimization, trauma, and hurt. This is to help create social change. Let us change the stigma that White males are always the “perpetrator” Help provide stakeholders with the opportunity to change cyberbullying policies and change the school climate. Create positive change, kindness, compassion, and empathy. I dedicate this to creating voices that are heard, stories that are told, and change to occur.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Social networking sites and mobile devices created a new generation of communication among adolescents, which lead to adverse outcomes (Bradbury et al., 2018). Adolescents spent about 70% of their time on social media platforms, which did not include schoolwork, and spent time communicating with others electronically (Alhajji et al., 2019). Cyberbullying happens in many venues such as email, voicemail, text messaging, social media platforms, and the web (Brandau et al., 2018). Due to the fast growth of electronic communication, cyberbullying has become a growing concern (Dennehy et al., 2020). Due to increased cyberbullying-related issues (Gaffney et al., 2019), prevention and intervention cyberbullying programs have sought to reduce cyberbullying perpetration and victimization (Gaffney et al., 2019).

Cyberbullying negatively impacts adolescents' psychological, physical, and social well-being, regardless of whether they are victims or perpetrators (Dennehy et al., 2020). Although numerous studies have explored the prevalence of the problem, few studies indicated if prevention/intervention programs were helpful for White male adolescents living in a rural community. In Chapter 1, the study's background, the purpose of the study, problem statement, theoretical framework, and nature of the study are discussed. Specific definitions, assumptions, scope, and delimitations will also be reviewed.

### **Background of Study**

Social media, mobile devices, and electronic media platforms changed the way adolescents communicate with each other (Bradbury et al., 2017). In a study, 88% of youth indicated that they had immediate access to the internet and own a computer or

smartphone, which provided them with the opportunity to be targeted or aggressively target others (Gaffney et al., 2019). Like traditional bullying, cyberbullying is defined as a purpose-driven act creating harm inflicted on others using computers, cell phones, or other electronic tools (Espelage & Hong, 2017). Technology has become a gateway for cyberbullying (Tanrikulu, 2018), which negatively impacts psychological, physical, and social well-being (Dennehy et al., 2020). Cyberbullying has created challenges for teachers, parents, and policymakers (Tanrikulu, 2018) due to amount of time adolescents spend on social media (Dennehy et al., 2020).

Prevention and intervention programs are important to prevent and intervene with cyberbullying incidents and provide support and guidance (Tanrikulu, 2018). But research has indicated that further research is needed to identify the effectiveness of these anti-cyberbullying programs (Gaffney et al., 2019). The risk that cyberbullying presents to an adolescent's health and well-being warranted the need for evidence-based prevention and intervention efforts on adolescent White males in a rural community (Dennehy et al., 2020). Researchers have often focused on in-person bullying and victimization rather than cyberbullying itself and the benefits of prevention and intervention programs (Bradbury et al., 2018).

### **Problem Statement**

Cyberbullying is an ongoing problem (Young et al., 2017), but prevention education can provide teenagers safety and assurance, affording individuals with the ability to cope with cyberbullying (Adorjan & Ricciardelli, 2019). Aggression done remotely can manifest into a variety of unhealthy issues but can be prevented with

education and support by school officials, parents, and guidance (Yang et al., 2020). Schools are where prevention and addressing cyberbullying, bullying, and other unwanted behaviors are held responsible for protection and education (Young et al., 2017). However, further research is needed to assist school counselors, principals, and parents in preventing or intervening when cyberbullying episodes occur. Little information has demonstrated the effectiveness of prevention and intervention education (Tanrikulu, 2018). Most research has focused on the prevalence of cyberbullying-related health outcomes rather than the social and psychological effects of prevention and intervention programs involving cyberbullying from a unique perspective (Bandeau & Evanson, 2018).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to examine the experiences and perceptions that White rural males had about cyberbullying programs they were in when adolescents. A generic qualitative approach allows researchers to understand how individuals interpreted their own experiences, how they viewed their world, and how the meaning of how something that happened contributed to their own experience (Kennedy, 2016). The information generated through this study can help inform those who create and administer anti-cyberbullying programs and result in positive outcomes for this population.

### **Research Question**

What are the experiences and perceptions of White rural males of cyberbullying prevention/intervention programs that they were involved in when adolescents?



### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

The theoretical framework chosen for this study was Vygotsky's social development theory. Social development theory explains how children and adolescents develop in thinking and behaving (Ungvarsky, 2020). This theory is used to explore how children and individuals of all ages learn by exposure and how they get knowledge (Ungvarsky, 2020). Therefore, this theory can help to understand the social effects of learning in an individual and the social impact of communication when addressing cyberbullying among White male youth (Kennedy, 2019). Evidence-based cyberbullying prevention and intervention methods have helped adolescents from cyberbullying victimization and harm (Tanrikulu, 2018). Prevention and intervention programs have been advocated for by state and local government agencies and school-regulated programs (Gaffney et al., 2019).

### **Nature of the Study**

A generic qualitative approach was utilized to identify the experiences and perceptions of White rural males of cyberbullying prevention/intervention programs that they participated in when adolescents. A generic qualitative inquiry provides flexibility and knowledge and the existence of truth regarding a specific issue (Kennedy, 2019), which helped gain the knowledge and understanding of these experiences and perceptions. Incorporating a generic qualitative design such as grounded, phenomenology, or case study can occur by exploring social or human issues and incorporating inquiry (Kennedy, 2019).

## Definitions

*Adolescent*: An individual ages 13–18 (Bradbury et al., 2017). The term *adolescent* will be interchanged with *youth* and *teens* for this study.

*Cyber-aggression*: Unwanted behaviors resulting in harm to another person, intentional act, carried out by an individual or group using electronic forms of contact (Gaffney et al., 2019).

*Cyberbullying*: Intention to harm, insult, threaten, or harass someone using technology; repetitive, power imbalance, and aggressive behavior unique to online environments, taking place across a variety of venues, occurring across time and geographical boundaries, which can be done in a single episode or multiple (Bradbury et al., 2018; Bandeau et al., 2018)

*Cyber-victimization or cyberbullying victimization (CBV)*: Behavior by another person outside the limits of appropriate action that creates harm (Bradbury et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2020).

*Information communication technology (ICT)*: Information and communication technologies such as mobile devices, smart devices, the use of text messages/ phone calls, email, social networking sites/social media (Bradbury et al., 2018).

*Intervention*: Strategies for cyberbullying intervention such as empathy training, educational complaints, or programs created by cooperative work with youth participants (Gaffney et al., 2019)

*Prevention*: Techniques or approaches that reduce cyberbullying perpetration and victimization and the aim to prevent cyberbullying experiences before they occur

(Gaffney et al., 2019; Tanrikulu, 2018).

*Victim:* Any individual (adolescent) who has been negatively victimized by bullying, for example, those who have experienced internal and external issues resulting from cyber victimization (Bradbury et al., 2017).

*Victimization:* Any behavior by another individual outside the limit of appropriate behavior, which creates harm (Bradbury et al., 2018).

### **Assumptions**

In conducting this research, several assumptions were made. The first assumption was that participants would be forthcoming in expressing the truth about cyberbullying exposure. Second, I assumed that prevention/intervention programs would effectively decrease/and or educate White rural males when they were in adolescence. The third assumption was that participants who completed the program and did not drop out of the program.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Researchers have shown that adolescents prefer to communicate with others by using electronic devices and that such devices have changed the way adolescents interacted with one another (Bradbury et al., 2018; Tulane et al., 2017). Incorporation of such devices has increased the severity of cyberbullying victimization (Cava et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020). Research indicated that females, race, and culture are among the factors that increase the chance of cyberbullying. Therefore, this study's scope focused on prevention and intervention programs in rural northern South Carolina high schools. This research focused on cyberbullying programs and the effectiveness for White rural

males. Conducting interviews in person was a preferred method; however, due to COVID-19 interviews were completed by telephone. This study did not focus on the experiences of adults, parents, or administrators. However, it should be noted that I interviewed adults (18+) about their experiences in cyberbullying programs when they were adolescents (under 18).

### **Limitations**

Potential barriers included the inability to contact individuals in person due to COVID-19 and difficulty recruiting participants for interviews. Due to all online interactions, this posed difficulty in reaching out to stakeholders and parents. This study's limitations included not being able to use face-to-face contact to perform semistructured interviews and ability to reach the sample size required for saturation. Researchers must go through awareness and view the process from an interpretive lens rather than assumptions (Kennedy, 2019).

### **Significance**

This qualitative generic research study helped understand the experiences and perceptions of White rural males of cyberbullying prevention/intervention programs that they were involved in when adolescents. Due to limited information concerning cyberbullying victimization and its association with school experiences on White male adolescents, this study explored prevention/education program experiences. Current research showed conflicting evidence regarding demographic differences (Alhajji et al., 2019). Research has also concentrated on cyberbullying in middle grade and urban environments (Reason & Boyd, 2016). However, the information was limited when

exploring cyberbullying/bullying from perpetrators/victims' perspectives in a rural setting.

This research study provides stakeholders such as principals, teachers, parents, and counselors the ability to understand how and why cyberbullying is a growing epidemic and prevent and intervene. This research aimed to create social change by increasing the awareness of education programs, which can help generate a higher level of evaluation needed to end long-term challenges that students, especially the White male population, endure with cyberbullying. With this research, the hope was to provide a hands-on account of how cyberbullying affects young White males in rural communities and provide quality prevention to reduce negative outcomes. With more online communication, it is vital to understand how cyberbullying happened in rural communities and how effective prevention and intervention education programs were utilized.

### **Summary**

Cyberbullying continues to stem from an imbalance of power and control, where perpetrators use social media platforms to humiliate, threaten, or intimidate others (Alhajji et al., 2019). Therefore, prevention and intervention programs are needed to decrease cyberbullying and its negative impact (Alhajji et al., 2019). Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study, including the theoretical framework and purpose. I emphasized the significance of the research and its limitations. Chapter 2 provides a detailed literature review of the previous studies on cyberbullying and the prevalence of prevention and intervention programs. I analyzed research regarding the gap of this study and the

knowledge needed to understand prevention and intervention strategies for cyberbullying.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this generic qualitative study, I explored the experiences and perceptions that White rural males had about cyberbullying programs they were in when they were adolescents. With 90% of U.S. adolescents having access to the Internet daily and 70% of those adolescents using at least two social media platforms for communication, youth encounter cyberbullying (Alhajji et al., 2019). Cyberbullying negatively affects physical, social, and psychological well-being (Dennehy et al., 2020). Cyberbullying is experienced differently for everyone as it is a personal experience resulting in consequences unique to each victim (Brandau et al., 2018). Although most cyberbullying occurrences occur outside of school, cyberbullying/bullying often begins at school, creating impacts that resonate within school boundaries (Adorjan et al., 2019). Many studies regarding cyberbullying prevention and intervention programs and strategies are available, but many lack an understanding of cyberbullying and prevention/intervention regarding an adolescent's personal experience and perspective (Dennehy et al., 2020).

In this chapter, I provide a review of a multitude of research about cyberbullying prevention and antibullying programs that provide a positive or negative experience for White males in high school who live in a rural community. In the first part of this section, I discuss the literature review strategy and then explain Vygotsky's theory of social development and how this theory applies to this study. Following this discussion is a review of the history of cyberbullying of adolescents and the variety of prevention and intervention programs utilized in schools. The last section of this literature review includes a discussion of the effectiveness of prevention/intervention related to

cyberbullying. Finally, I explore the gap in the literature regarding cyberbullying experiences of White male adolescents.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Information was gathered from journal articles, databases, and academic search engines regarding cyberbullying, adolescents, rural communities, technology, and prevention/intervention school programs. The following was researched to provide information regarding the literature review: PsycInfo, Google Scholar, Thoreau, ERIC, Walden University Library, and South Carolina Annual Report on Discipline, Crime, and Violence, South Carolina Safe Act. I searched for peer-reviewed articles published from 2016 or later associated with cyberbullying and adolescents. These databases provided me with the ability to identify specific terminology and data regarding cyberbullying and prevention/intervention programs. To conduct this review, I incorporated the following keywords and terms into the search engine: *bullying, cyberbullying, cyberbullying victimization, cyberbullying aggression, social development theory, zone of proximal development, cultural development, social development, cyberbullying impact, mental health, Vygotsky, online aggression, high school, males, youth, adolescents, prevention and intervention programs, rural adolescents, South Carolina, gender, youth, teens, and technology.*

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was Vygotsky's theory of social development. Social development theory is used to explore how individuals learn by exposure and develop a way of thinking and behaving. Vygotsky was convinced that a



child's learning was affected by the culture in which they are raised and the individuals they interact with (Ungvarsky, 2020). This theory explains the social effects of learning and communication on adolescents while addressing cyberbullying (Kennedy, 2019).

### **Development of Social Development Theory**

Vygotsky started his work early during the Russian revolution when Marx began exploring collectivism and socialism (Fani et al., 2011). Researchers suggested that Vygotsky incorporated this revolution into his theory by indicating that culture is shaped by ideas and events shaping one's development (Fani et al., 2011). Vygotsky noted that much of a child's education and cognitive development depended on socialization (Fani et al., 2011; Ungvarsky, 2020). The zone of proximal development was the center of Vygotsky's theory, which refers to how a child could accomplish tasks with the assistance of others (Ungvarsky, 2020).

### **Components of Social Development Theory**

Social development theory refers to how much learning depends on how much an individual relied on the zone of proximal development for learning growth (Fani et al., 2011; Ungvarsky, 2020). There are three main components to the social development theory represented by the zone of proximal learning: learning through imitation, hearing instructions on doing and completing, and learning new skills, tasks, or behaviors often learned through collaboration (Ungvarsky, 2020). Learning occurs when imitation is incorporated as a means of modeling by motivation, reward, or reinforcement (Salleh et al., 2018). At an early age, individuals learn through imitation or observation, gathering information from someone who knows how to complete a task and imitating what they

see or hear (Mahn, 1999; Ungvarsky, 2020). The second component is learning through hearing instructions on doing and completing tasks. The theory related to terms of self-initiated and cooperative dialogue (Belyh, 2019, Salleh et al., 2018). Hearing instructions and then doing as adolescents often done by interacting with peers, teachers, and sometimes digital (Belyh, 2019; Locklear, 2020). Third, learning new skills, tasks, or behaviors often learned through collaboration relates to the theory of social development through social interactions and the learning process, which usually provided by others, and using technology where learning takes place (Belyh, 2019; Locklear, 2020). Again, the central concept of Vygotsky's social development theory is that social interaction is a fundamental aspect of the development of cognition, social interaction, and learning (Lane et al., 2021; Ungvarsky, 2020).

Vygotsky explored how cognitive development stemmed from social interactions guided within the zone of proximal development (Mulindi et al., 2019). Vygotsky also introduced the concept of scaffolding, which refers to how adults' model or demonstrate how to solve a problem (Dotsenko et al., 2020). Then children can investigate on their own. Learning derives from connecting with other human beings: teachers, peers, and family (Mulindi et al., 2019). Therefore, social media becomes an essential aspect of adolescents' socializing with others (Mosley et al., 2019; Mulindi et al., 2019).

### **Importance of Social Interactions**

Vygotsky's social development theory can explain how to increase socialization influences and cognitive development. Based on the theory, social actions or functions are the core of the story and thinking (DeVries, 2000). Vygotsky indicated that

communication among children could not be learned without the influence of others (DeVries, 2000). Vygotsky suggested that the human mind's natural, individual, and social facets of action led to consciousness due to culture and nature (Mahn, 1999). Social interaction with others is an essential aspect of growing (Vygotsky, 1978). Due to the aggressive nature of cyberbullying and its impact on individuals, the social learning theory explains the notion of cyberbullying others (Bae, 2021). Based on the ehtory, adolescents learned to imitate aggressive behavior by exploring cyberspace technology observation, and the lack of self-control affects logical thinking and functions that originated from relationships (Bae, 2021; Vygotsky, 1978).

### **Virtual Interactions**

Adolescents navigate life through collaboration with others they encounter during a valuable time in their lives. Adolescent years are when youth learn to navigate life and develop and maintain friendships, relationships, social interactions (Holfeld et al., 2019; Mahn,1999, Reed et al., 2016). Adolescents gain independence between middle school and high school, explore beliefs about the world, and develop lasting friendships (Reed et al., 2016). But adolescents who often struggled to create and discover themselves while balancing middle/high school roles were likely to experience cyber victimization (Holfeld et al., 2019; Reed et al., 2016). During this time, the Internet was a way for individuals to heighten their sense of awareness, discover their individuality, role-play, establish blogs/personal websites, and engage in social interactions with others by gathering, sending, and receiving instant messages as a way of communication (Holfeld et al., 2016; Mahn,1999; Reed et al., 2016).

Social interaction and emotional well-being altered with the growth of the Internet. This growth and the advancement of technology impacted adolescents' development socially and emotionally (Mulindi et al., 2019). Research indicated that 45% of adolescents used technology as a form to date and communicate with each other (Mosley et al., 2019). Adolescents incorporated a variety of social platforms to share with others, such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, gaming, and Instagram (Mulindi et al., 2019; Ni et al., 2020;). These venues provided adolescents with the opportunity to reinvent themselves, share personal information and express their social lifestyle all by the click of a button (Mulindi et al., 2019). Additionally, researchers concluded that texting provided teens with the opportunity to stay connected with others all the time (Tulane et al., 2017).

Adolescents' social development thrived on communication with others, what they see, how they act, and their perceptions. Therefore, individuals exposed to social media perceived things differently than others who were not told, leading to negative attributes such as cyberbullying (Mulindi et al., 2019). Text messaging became the primary method for communication among teenagers creating disconnect among student attention, connection with others, and changes in personal, circumstantial, and school environments (Tulane et al., 2017). Technology and the growth of internet usage among teenagers impacted students' development and the way they interacted and socialized with others (Mulindi et al., 2019). The environment in which children grow influenced how they thought and acted; each function depended on another process creating the individual's cultural development physical and mental growth (DeVries et al., 2000,

Mulindi et al., 2019, Tulene et al., 2017).

## **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables**

### **Adolescents & Technology**

Increased use of technology among adolescents Technology benefited adolescents depending on its implementation (Mosley et al., 2019). Adolescents ranging from 11–18 years of age incorporate the Internet as their primary communication mode (Betts et al., 2017; Cataldo et al., 2021). This communication increased over the past decade, which created an opportunity to be connected to the Internet anywhere and anytime (Betts et al., 2017; Cataldo et al., 2021; Mosley et al., 2019). Adolescents have grown up with quick and consistent access to social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and many more social outlets for communication (Cataldo et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2020; Mulindi et al., 2019). Facebook provided the opportunity to gain access to relatives, friendships, and real-life friends live by sharing photos, videos, and live updates and the opportunity to join specific groups with similar interests (Betts et al., 2016; Bradbury et al., 2018; Cataldo et al., 2017). Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat venues provided individuals with the opportunity to share stories, videos, photos, as well as the ability to alter pictures sent to groups of individuals or one on one (Cataldo et al., 2017). Social media platforms have allowed adolescents to express themselves and act more openly and honestly without feeling the pressure they would face (Chen, 2020; Morin et al., 2018; Mosley et al., 2019).

How technology has led to new communication The ongoing development of social media platforms and the accessibility of technology created a new form of

communication for most adolescents. Technology has increased the sense of ownership and security in creating boundaries and protection within relationships and improving safety by utilizing platform security measures to protect themselves from harmful actions by others (Mosley et al., 2018; Mulindi et al., 2019). Technology use in schools provided individuals' ability to talk with others in the class, keep in touch with families if needed, and for teachers to distribute class information (Tulane et al., 2017). But school agents need to pay close attention to the number of time adolescents devote to social media and the amount of emotional engagement one tends to dedicate due to the adverse cognitive and behavioral outcomes arising from increased technology usage (Yang et al., 2020).

Increased occurrence of cyberbullying though technology can provide security, validation of characteristics, and social relationships, these outlets also harm others (Barlett et al., 2019; Bretts et al., 2017; Mulindi et al., 2019). For some, technology has provided an opportunity to keep track of others and harass them day and night by posting negative comments or remarks that could follow them into adulthood and provoke mental brutality (Betts et al., 2017; Morin et al., 2018; Mosley et al., 2019; Sultan et al., 2021). Cyberbullying behaviors increased social, emotional, and psychological harm from simple text messages being displayed and sent by a click of a button (Alhajji et al., 2019, Chan & Wong, 2019; Chen & Cheng, 2017; Midamba et al., 2019). Various modes of cyberbullying used to intimidate and harass others regardless of the adverse outcomes include chat rooms, video and photo clips, text messages, phone calls, videos, photos, instant messages, and websites (Reed et al., 2016; Soyeone et al.2019). Cyberbullying also includes spreading rumors, posting hateful messages, stealing others' account

information, sexting, and sending threats (Adorjan et al., 2019; Bradbury et al., 2018; Oonagh et al., 2020; Siegle, 2017).

Impact of cyberbullying Research indicated that adolescents are often confronted with online negativity such as cyberbullying. The increased Internet use created school truancy and problems with grades and emotional issues (Erreygers et al., 2018; Li et al., 2016; Oonagh et al., 2020). A recent study conducted by Feijoo et al. (2021) in Spain addressed that face-to-face bullying is often transferred to online virtual bullying, which is harmful to most adolescents. The repetitive nature and dangerous words create an imbalance of power that consistently develops frustrations and harm and does not go away quickly, negatively impacting adolescents' mental health (Feijoo et al., 2021).

Perceptions of bullying the way individuals viewed actions and behaviors reflect how and when individuals shared experiences of cyberbullying/bullying actions. Brochado et al. (2021) found that adolescents in Portugal tend to normalize and tolerate cyberbullying and identified that they are just words. Cyber aggression was not identified as pure aggression. This study showed that girls were more willing to participate than boys, leading researchers to believe that cyber victimization is underestimated (Brochado et al., 2021). Furthermore, research has identified that cyberbullying creates adverse emotional reactions. Canadian adolescents often dismissed or did not identify with cyberbullying; boys often disassociated themselves from gendered (Adorjan et al., 2019). Therefore, prevention and intervention strategies are needed to help adolescents work through emotional effects and teach adolescents appropriate coping strategies to help deal with everyday hassles and adverse events, providing regulation to emotions (Erreygers et

al., 2021).

### ***What is Cyberbullying?***

Cyberbullying has been defined in various ways that create issues for individuals. Approximately 90% of adolescents go online daily to communicate and interact with others (Gaffney et al., 2019; Skilbred-Fjeld et al., 2020). Over 70 % of those adolescents have used two social media platforms each day to share with others (Alhajji et al., 2019; Gaffney et al., 2019). Cyberbullying has been an ongoing issue in society due to the repeated and intentional cyber aggression that occurs daily while using digital technology (Abbott, 2020; Alhajji et al., 2019; Bae., 2021; Young et al., 2017). Cyberbullying has been defined as a purpose-driven act that inflicts harm on others, intentionally harasses, intimidates, and mistreats others repeatedly using cell phones, computers, or other electronic devices (Alhajji et al., 2019, Espelage et al., 2017, Ioannou et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2020). Ioannou et al. (2017) dissected the definition of cyberbullying further as follows: impersonation, written-verbal behavior, visual behavior, and exclusion. These repeat offenses and aggressive behaviors created various risks for adolescents that range in complexity (Menin et al., 2021).

Cyberbullying can be a single harassing comment, photo, or video circulated worldwide through electronic avenues, creating a drastic victimization impact.

Cyberbullying does not usually have a physical strength aspect. However, it is followed by a power imbalance incorporating technology and the Internet (Brandau et al., 2019).

Commonalities among definitions include spreading rumors, sending threatening messages, remaining in control, humiliating words, actions, and aggression towards



others, creating an increase in negative consequences (Agus et al., 2021; Bradbury et al., 2018). Cyberbullying is demonstrated through aggression on others privately and secretly, intentional in nature, and hurt and can view as deliberate, malicious acts on others, which create negative feelings and actions (Bradbury et al., 2018; Brandau et al., 2019; Midamba et al., 2019). These findings are like those of other researchers who found that cyberbullying results in adverse mental health outcomes creating a power and control imbalance (Skilbred-Fjeld et al., 2020).

Cyberbullying, a term often associated with the term victimization, is when an individual is outside of the limits of appropriate behavior, often causing harm utilizing some form of an electronic device. Bullying is an unwanted aggressive behavior involving power and control and is often repeated (Bradbury et al., 2018; DeSmet et al., 2018). In similar studies, researchers also indicated that cyberbullying is a repetitive behavior intended to create damage online or offline performed in a way that creates a power imbalance (Balakrishnan et al., 2018; Bradbury et al., 2018; Midamba et al., 2019). Cyberbullying can also be defined as an aggressive act often used by a group of individuals who repeatedly victimize an individual through social isolation, sometimes leading to a devastating and negative consequence (Balakrishnan et al., 2018; Bradbury et al., 2018; Midamba et al., 2019).

### ***Difference Between Traditional Bullying & Cyberbullying***

The devastating consequences of cyberbullying can be harmful and create adverse effects on adolescents. It is essential to understand that without a power and control discrepancy and the intention to harm another individual repeatedly, aggressive action is

not considered bullying or victimization (Bradbury et al., 2018; Menin et al., 2021). Research indicated by Irimescu et al. (2017) identified cyberbullying as bullying; however, different due to the way cyberbullying is carried out and manipulated by the aggressor. A group or person's indirect aggression through a social aspect provides the aggressor with power and control distributed by the lack of visual contact (Brandau et al., 2018; Irimescu et al., 2017). The intent to harass other individuals consistently creates harm using any technological device, creating emotional distress through social media avenues, emails, texting, and social networks (Skilbred-Fjeld et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2017). Researchers also identified that the intentional, aggressive actions were conducted utilizing devices to share humiliating pictures/videos/writings and posting hurtful, mean messages create emotional distress (Bae, 2021; Watts et al., 2017).

The growing number of internet users and platforms created on the Internet has impacted how users interact socially and psychologically. Researchers concluded that cyberbullying could be defined as aggressive, unwanted behaviors deliberately carried out through electronic devices such as computers, smartphones, email, text messages, and social networks to cause personal harm (Bae 2021; Irimescu et al., 2017, Watts et al., 2017). Cyberbullying has become an offshoot of bullying in terms of unwanted, aggressive behaviors inflicted on another to create harm leading to unfavorable consequences (Chen et al., 2017; Irimescu et al., 2017). Researchers have concluded that although the Internet has some good benefits, there seem to be many harmful outcomes (Watts et al., 2017).

Traditional bullying and cyberbullying are both concerns that affected

adolescents. Traditional bullying has been around since the early 1970s. Cyber has continued to develop into cyberspace, now known as cyberbullying, due to the intense infraction and altercations created in cyberspace, creating long-term and short-term emotional consequences (Chen et al., 2017; Menin et al., 2021). Differentiation between these two types of bullying and its severity is pertinent to grasp the real hardships and similarities of both devastating forms of abuse and aggression (Chen et al., 2017; Chen, 2020; Dennehy et al., 2020). Traditional bullying is often physical or verbal harm inflicted on another through offline exclusion or extortion (Chan et al., 2019; DeSmet et al., 2018).

### ***Conceptualization of Cyberbullying***

The action or process of forming a concept or idea of cyberbullying addressed the issue of cyberbullying. Conceptualization of cyberbullying was identified as the intent to harm another individual without consequence or responsibility due to the anonymity of the action (Dennehy et al., 2020; Halpern et al., 2017). Although some researchers faced challenges conceptualizing cyberbullying, it is argued that cyberbullying had very similar characteristics to traditional bullying (Dennehy et al., 2020, Halpern et al., 2017, Selkie et al., 2016). Cyberspace made bullying a lot easier due to the accessibility in adolescents' lives, which carries a risk of cyberbullying victimization (Ansary et al., 2020; Dennehy et al., 2020). Cyberbullying has been a highly complex situation characterized by ambiguity in traditional bullying. However, some believed it is challenging to assess the repetition in cyberbullying incidences because one harmful act can be shared over multiple facets of the Internet (Dennehy et al., 2020, Halpern et al., 2017; Selkie et al., 2016).

Cyberbullying has been impactful, creating various harmful feelings and emotions, both physically and emotionally. Cyberbullying victimization negatively impacted adolescents mentally, physically, behaviorally, and socially (Kim et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020; Reed et al., 2016; Walker et al., 2019). The research found that mentally adolescents were among the most vulnerable when dealing with cyberbullying; it was stated that males are 4% more likely to attempt suicide, and females are 3% more likely to attempt suicide than non-victimized adolescents (Lee & Chun, 2020; Kim et al., 2019). Adolescent years tend to be when mental health disorders were most vulnerable and emerging (Kim et al., 2019). A variety of issues such as anxiety, depression, substance use, low self-esteem, sleep issues, eating disorders, unsafe sexual behaviors, suicidal ideations, and as stated above, suicide were among the most severe; external problems also can arise such as self-harm, aggression, and problems socially (Bradbury et al., 2018, Kim et al., 2019, Lee & Chun, 2020, Siegle, 2017; Skilbred-Field et al., 2020). Researchers expressed that youth would experience internal problems identified by having a poor appetite, stomach pains, fatigue, and headaches, creating issues at home and school. Children exposed to cyberbullying victimization by the impact and usage of technology and social media, increased the risk of suicide ideation and mental health issues (Kim et al., 2019; Lee & Chun (2020, Morin et al., 2018).

Depression derived from cyberbullying, and the internalization of harmful actions created severe long-lasting issues. Victimization penetrated onto someone by cyberbullying was related to elements such as depression, substance use, loneliness, behavior issues, suicidal thoughts, self-harm, hopelessness, and many others (Ansary et

al., 2020; Balakrishnan et al., 2018; Bradbury et al., 2017; Halpern et al., 2017; Reed et al., 2016, Reason et al., 2016, Serim et al., 2020, Skilbred-Field et al., 2020). As mentioned before, power imbalance influenced both the perpetrator and the victim's psychological, social, and physical characteristics when the perpetrator was identified (Ansary et al., 2020; Balakrishnan et al., 2018; Betts et al., 2017; Dennehy et al., 2020). A pre-existing power imbalance does not have to exist, especially when the cyber world's nature created changes within the distribution of power and control and when relationships were identified as change agents and unstable (Betts et al., 2017; Dennehy et al., 2020). The internet and social media platforms allowed a broader audience to engage one another due to greater access to online material, resulting in a higher probability of assault (Brandau et al., 2018; Halpern et al., 2017).

Cyberbullying impacted the way adolescents viewed situations and outcomes. For instance, adolescents conceptualized harm based on the seriousness of victim impacted and purposes (Brandau et al., 2018; Brochado et al., 2021; Dennehy et al., 2020). The intention of cyberbullying was often motivated by internal factors such as jealousy and revenge, creating a negative impact determined by the victim's perception of events (Dennehy et al., 2020). Adolescents believed that cyberbullying could happen whether there is an intent to harm and when jealousy or revenge become internal factors, normalizing the behaviors (Brochado et al., 2021; Dennehy et al., 2020). Like Dennehy, researchers determined that adolescents' perception of what is or is not bullying in terms of traditional and cyberbullying was determined by how individuals perceive the bullying (Brochado et al., 2021; Menin et al., 2021).

The emotional dependency that developed created issues in reasoning, and the lack of support with online usage tending to affect adolescent psychological wellbeing. Furthermore, Passive social media used results in aggravated depressive symptoms which created a loss of interest in things, comparing one's wellbeing and loneliness; created by the lack of social support (Cataldo et al., 2021). Adolescents questioned the purpose of life, relationships, and their ability to manage reality. Research reported that individuals who experienced cyberbullying became angry, experienced academic issues, psychological and emotional problems, and the danger of becoming cyberbullies themselves (Cataldo et al., 2021; Watts et al., 2017). Adolescents became addicted to their social media devices, constantly feeling pressured, worried, or judged by others, created new anxieties or pre-existing magnifying symptoms because of the intensity of social media networking (Cataldo et al., 2021; Watts et al., 2017).

Social media created an alternative outlet for adolescents to privately explore and communicate with others. Social media provided a perfect outlet for harmful messages to be sent out, reaching many individuals at one time, creating cyberbullying to grow at a rapid rate (Alhajji et al., 2019; Ansary., 2020; Bae et al., 2021; Mobin et al., 2017). Cyberbullying behaviors expanded through the web in a variety of ways, such as verbal/written text (text messages, phone calls), visually (sending or sharing videos or photographs), impersonating others (using another person's account online or name), and exclusion of others from a group communication (Bae., 2021; Bradbury et al., 2017; Oonagh et al., 2020). Unlike face-to-face conflict, words exchanged are often forgotten whereas, communication written and repeatedly spread by the perpetrator online creates

conflict and harm (Betts et al., 2017; Bradbury et al., 2017; Halpern et al., 2017). Social media platforms such as the Internet or cellphone allow the aggressor to act without taking responsibility and without consequences due to anonymity (Betts et al., 2017; Bradbury et al., 2017; Halpern et al., 2017).

There are no limits to who gets hurt when it comes to cyberbullying. Aggressive actions must be a power differential between individuals involved in these behaviors and repeated behaviors to be considered bullying (Bradbury et al., 2018; Brandau et al., 2018). The prevalence of cyberbullying victimization varies across demographics such as race, age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and individual experiences (Cataldo et al., 2021; Gaffney et al., 2019). Research indicated that cyberbullying victimization creates negativity on a person, such as mental, physical, emotional, social, and behavioral issues (Cataldo et al., 2021; Cava et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020).

Cyberbullying was a widespread global issue that differed from traditional bullying in various ways. The ability to carry out actions privately without constant supervision creates a higher risk than conventional bullying. (Halpern et al., 2017). Previous research indicated that due to the increased usage of technology since the COVID impact of 2020, cyberbullying has risen, and the effect has drastically impacted the lives of adolescents (Agus et al., 2021; Alhajji et al., 2019; Betts et al., 2016). The lack of face-to-face interaction, the anonymity of not knowing the perpetrator, the speed of distribution of information, and the lack of parental control create a more significant impact on how bullying affects individuals (Agus et al., 2021; Brandau et al., 2018). Hence, research suggests that cyberbullying was a widespread form of interpersonal

aggression found in society, and therefore it was necessary to address prevention and intervention, adding relief and comfort (Gaffney et al., 2019).

### ***Victim Outcomes (Traditional Bullying Versus Cyberbullying)***

Trouble focusing, maintaining friendships, depression, anxiety, and lacking emotional and social support create harmful outcomes. Ioannou et al. (2017) expressed that aggressive, unwanted behaviors in cyberspace make these issues. Researchers explored a variety of cyberbullying features, such as anonymity, information dissemination speed, parental control, and lack of face-to-face interaction (Agus et al., 2021; Menin et al., 2021). Victims often felt helpless due to the unknown of perpetrators and the large audience involved in gaining access to information or photos that have been spread so rapidly throughout the digital world (Agus et al., 2021). Tanrikulu (2018) described cyberbullying as a behavior carried out through electronic or digital media by a group or person that repeatedly communicates with an individual.

Incorporating an aggressive or hostile message was used to create discomfort or harm on another. According to Tanrikulu (2018), adverse circumstances of cyberbullying affected individuals psychologically, physically, socially, and academic levels. Three elements of cyberbullying can be defined as an intention to harm, repetitive nature, and apparent power. Imbalance was often referred to as the existence of aggressive behavior (Gaffney et al., 2019; Menin et al., 2021). Gaffney et al. (2019) explained that a cyberbully could share or exploit an embarrassing image, video, or photo of the victim one time or multiple times. When individuals liked or shared the content, the victimization repeatedly repeats, leaving the individual hurt or humiliated; the effects of



cyberbullying last forever and create a manifestation of imbalanced feelings (Gaffney et al., 2019; Menin et al., 2021). Previous research indicated that cyberbullying created adverse effects such as emotional distress, sadness, anger, detachment, and delinquent behaviors (Menin et al., 2021). Reed et al. (2016) identified cyberbullying as someone engaging in technology to repeatedly harassing, making fun of another individual and mistreating one using an online format.

Individuals who experienced cyberbullying were also impacted on an individual and social level. Adolescents experienced different thoughts and feelings that were hard to comprehend as they experienced cyberbullying personally or indirectly. Unlike traditional bullying, adolescents were challenged with facing cyberbullying victimization often alone and were challenged with the ease and speed of how information was shared (Menin et al., 2021; Oonagh et al., 2020; Reed et al., 2016). Cyberbullying can be an extension of conventional bullying due to similar customs of bullying (Menin et al., 2021; Oonagh et al., 2020). Both types of bullying afflicted harm on another, creating physical, mental, psychological damage, that is, a repetitive pattern of adverse offline or online action by intimidation, injury as well as incorporated fear (Menin et al., 2021; Oonagh et al., 2020, Reed et al., 2016). Traditional bullying often involved one-on-one in-person conflict resulting from a power imbalance, with a weaker individual often being overpowered by a more significant, more assertive person (Brandau et al., 2019). Cyberbullying occurred anytime and anywhere, making it difficult for the victim to escape, which was especially true to the tremendous amount of time adolescents spent on the Internet or some technological device (Skilbred-Fjeld et al., 2020).

Traditional bullies often intimidated and tormented their victims in person, usually on school grounds. In contrast, cyberbullies often prided themselves on remaining anonymous and using their anonymity to threaten others (Reed et al., 2016). Bullying has been addressed as a form of aggression that forces an individual to repeat and intentionally negative actions from one adolescent to another (Chan et al., 2020; Irimescu et al., 2017). Researchers explained that bullying is a social activity with other cultural implications. Every society had a dominant culture determining what standards were deemed appropriate and inappropriate in raising a child, education, and bars on behaviors (Irimescu et al., 2017). Therefore, the frequency of bullying actions differed in the context of cultural diversity and inter-ethnic dialogues (Irimescu et al., 2017).

Bullying created an imbalance of safety and harmony, whether in person or online. Cyberbullying was the division of traditional bullying with similar repetition, aggression, power imbalance, and intentional harm, which in cyberbullying was carried out through technology usage, creating a threat to the health and wellbeing of adolescents (Chan et al., 2020; Skilbred-Fjeld et al., 2020). Some differences between cyberbullying and traditional bullying were explored by technological expertise, gained direct or indirect status, the possibility of secrecy, and bystander roles (Chan et al., 2020). Cyberbullying and traditional bullying consisted of continuous, never-ending pressure and harm due to perpetrators' privacy of the Internet, social media, and the ability to invade victims' private living and personal space (Chan et al., 2020). Although cyberbullying differed from traditional bullying, the content of each remained similar in that it can spread rapidly, and the aggression was not limited to a particular place or time

(Alhajji et al., 2019). Perpetrators sought power over their victims in both forms of bullying; however, with cyberbullying, perpetrators kept their identity secret and unknown; leaving the victim wondering who and why the harm was being initiated (Alhajji et al., 2019). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying started to spread rapidly and was easily preserved, leaving the cyberbullying action unbearable to escape (Alhajji et al., 2019).

Bullying regardless of in-person or online, the consequences were the same, and harm was done. Cyberbullying was unique compared to traditional bullying due to its adverse outcomes (Tanrikulu, 2018). Traditional bullying has been defined as deliberate, intentional, repeated, and aggressive behavior formulated overtime on victims who seem helpless in defending themselves from attacks (Reason et al., 2016). On the other hand, cyberbullying expanded on that definition by including a means (i.e., electronic format) (Reason et al., 2016). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying is a way to carry out harmful, negative actions through technology through repetitive behavior (Feijoo et al., 2021). Due to both traditional and cyber nature, bullying created equally high aptitudes of psychological and emotional distress on targeted individuals, the imbalance of power and control with a less powerful individual or group (Feijoo et al., 2021). Reason et al., 2016). Individuals suffering from bullying, either traditionally or in cyber, indicate that they experienced symptoms the same; both leading to emotional, psychological, physical, and behavioral problems (Hinduja et al., 2019; Reason et al., 2016).

Cyberbullies targeted adolescents using different formats that created negative consequences. Electronic messages provided cyberbullies with the ability to

communicate messages secretly and with broader audiences, much different from traditional bullying (Reason et al., 2016). Previous research concluded that cyberbullying correlates with traditional bullying, where individuals who have been targeted by cyberbullying may have been targets of conventional bullying (Beltran-Catalan et al., 2018). Bullies do not feel responsible or accountable for their actions using online platforms as they would in a face-to-face setting (Reason et al., 2016). Researchers identified that individuals who were not the target of traditional bullying could be targeted online through hidden bullying methods (Beltran-Catalan et al., 2018; Reason et al., 2016). Another interesting difference between traditional bullying and cyberbullying was the fact that people who were being bullied through the Internet may not know the perpetrator or group of individuals doing the bullying, and the bullying were either completed face to face or online (Reason et al., 2016; Menin et al., 2021).

The component of cyberbullying differed from those of traditional bullying in a variety of diverse ways. Cyberbullying lacked the physical aspect of harm, as traditional bullying is often perceived as face-to-face interaction, creating an uncertain intent that is often stopped if the bully and victim are not physically present (Dennehy et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2017). Dennehy et al. (2020) suggested that these two types of bullying differed only by the medium it was incorporated, and harm was inflicted. Both traditional and cyberbullying share an equivalent plan: to inflict harm on others; the difference where and how damage was intended and inflicted on someone else such as in-person or cyber (Alhajji et al., 2019; Ansary., 2020; Bae., 2021; Brandau et al., 2018). Victims of face-to-face bullying escaped the bullying and found relief at home or in the

safety of their room. Simultaneously, cyberbullying allowed the perpetrator to stalk the victim anywhere and all the time and which allowed the perpetrator to remain anonymous (Alhajji et al., 2019., Brandau et al., 2018). Research suggested that those who bully, do not feel accountable or responsible for their actions online as they would face to face (Reason et al., 2016).

Online bullying behaviors created various silent and harmful issues for all adolescents. Individuals who would not likely be targets of traditional bullying might be pursued by online bullying through concealed methods (Bradau et al., 2018; Reason et al., 2016). Cyberbullying and school bullying are problematic and create difficulty for individuals and others due to aggressive, repeated, and intentional behavior (Acosta et al., 2019; O'Brien, 2019). These behaviors are connected, creating issues involving the Internet and mobile phones, making adolescents new ways to harass and intimidate others (Chan et al., 2019; O'Brien, 2019).

School bullying has been a social and emotional issue for many years. With the rise of technology, cyberbullying has been equally advanced in creating problems for adolescents, such as psychosocial behaviors (Acosta et al., 2019; Cataldo et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2019; Skilbred-Fjeld et al., 2020). These studies indicated that cyberbullying and traditional bullying behaviors where aggression and overt harassment occur either in person or online expose individuals to psychological distress (Chan et al., 2019; Chen, 2020; Choi et al., 2019; Dennehy et al., 2020; Skilbred-Fjeld et al., 2020). Although bullying and cyberbullying had similar attack and harmful messages, they remained different in the deliverance of the bullying in terms of face to face causing physical harm

and cyberbullying, indirectly incorporating a type of electronic device (DeSmet et al., 2018; Menin et al., 2021). Victims often worried that friendships could be destroyed or feared that they would disrupt the status quo and would not have help from friends if they reported bullying, and the fear of retaliation was deemed high (Erreygers et al., 2018; O'Brien, 2019).

### ***Demographics & Cyberbullying***

**Age.** Cyberbullies and victims are not limited to any specific gender, race, ethnicity, academic maturity, or age; the power of imbalance continues to exist when cyberbullying occurs. However, 88% of American adolescents ages 13-18 communicate by cell phone or computer (Bradbury et al., 2018, Tanrikulu, 2018). Internet usage allowed adolescents the ability to engage with others through social networking, leading to cyberbullying episodes (Alhajji et al., 2019; Bradbury et al., 2018). One in three adolescents in 30 countries reported being online cyberbullying victims (UNICEF, 2019). Studies indicated that victimization was higher among Females, Racial backgrounds, and White students (Alhajji et al., 2019); Hinduja et al., 2019). The gender gap was explained due to girls' propensity to engage in indirect and relational forms of bullying, such as spreading rumors, while boys tend to act on direct bullying such as physical altercations (Alhajji et al., 2019; Hinduja et al., 2019).

**Gender.** Gender created a difference in how cyberbullying actions and behaviors are viewed. For instance, male adolescents were more involved in online video games and communication, making charge and intense transmission in the male population where cyberbullying is most likely to occur (Alhajji et al., 2019, Bae, 2021). Although

females were likely to be victims of cyberbullying, others showed males were more likely to experience the effects of cyberbullying victimization and concluded that insufficient research had been conducted that explored gender differences in cyberbullying victimization (Diaz et al., 2019; Hinduja et al., 2019; Holfeld et al., Ioannou et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2020; Skilbred-Fjeld et al., 2020; 2019; Yang et al., 2021). One of many studies involving school-wide cyberbullying victimization and social-emotional learning among middle and high school students engaged over 15,000 students ranging from 6th grade to 12th grade found that: 52% Female, 49% White, 21% Black, 12 % Latino, and approximately 3.8 % Asian were victims of cyberbullying; while another study indicated that African American students are less likely to be victimized than White or Hispanic peers (Kowalski et al., 2020; Morin et al., 2018). Whereas, in another study, females were twice as likely to report some cyberbullying than males, and non-White students were 50% less likely to report any time of cyberbullying victimization (Alhajji et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2020).

Researchers in another study explained that male students have a higher percentage of cyberbullying than females due to media exposure and violence awareness. Male students report more cyberbullying offending others (Alhajji et al., 2019; Bae, 2021; Lee et al., 2020.; Menin et al., 2021). A study conducted in Korea explored gender and the difference between males and females. In South Korea, male and female adolescents did not experience cyberbullying. Female adolescents are often dismissed from chatting apps, harassed, and gossiped about appearance. Boys were likely to be cyberbullying in online gaming, especially from strangers, and girls were likely to be

victimized by acquaintances, concluding that self-injury and anger outbursts are higher in males than females (Lee et al., 2020; Rusby et al., 2019).

Although most of the research indicated contradictory evidence regarding demographic differences related to cyberbullying, some research shows that being a female is a considerable predictor of cyberbullying victimization. Researchers showed conflicting information regarding White students being highly affected by cyberbullying, while other studies indicate minority youth experiencing diverse forms of bullying than White youth (Alhajji et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2020). Some additional factors considered were cyber victimization and cyber perpetration. Research eluded that male adolescent participated in cyber perpetration more than females, and males were more likely to externalize issues when faced with cyberbullying (Jackson et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020).

Behavioral and psychological issues associated with cyberbullying tend to create problems globally for adolescents. Adolescents were five times more likely to attempt behavioral acts or suicide than non-bullied individuals (Lee et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2020). Adolescent males often disassociated themselves from gender messages and the negative consequences tied to some forms of cyberbullying, such as sexting (Adorjan et al., 2019). Waasdorp et al., 2019). Female adolescents were prone to feel ashamed, while male adolescents are idealized when sexting (Adorjan et al., 2019; Waasdorp et al., 2019). Studies on gender and cyberbullying concluded that cyberbullying was typically high for the same and other gender typicality for males was more elevated in response (Jackson et al., 2020).



Emerging social media and online chatter between males and females created a unique online atmosphere that resulted in victimization. Boys and girls shared that they were harassed online. However, girls reported being targets of online rumor-spreading, which included false rumors and images being sent, and boys tended to actively participate in physical aggression and possible self-injurious behaviors (Anderson, 2018; Lee et al., 2020; Mobin et al., 2017). Research indicated that approximately 60% of girls and 59% of boys have experienced a type of abusive behavior (Anderson, 2018). Girls generally reported the incident to someone, especially if they received an explicit image, and girls usually experienced several different types of bullying (Anderson, 2018; Mobin et al., 2017). Studies on gender and cyberbullying concluded that cyberbullying was typically high for the same and other gender typicality for males was more elevated in response (Jackson et al., 2020).

Cyberbullying victimization had a variety of adverse outcomes on individuals regardless of gender. Gender non-conforming males experienced cyber victimization and harsh consequences from others (Ioannou et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2020). Other research concluded that cyberbullying victimization has mixed results regarding gender differences. Therefore, more research is needed to explore the importance of gender in discussing cyber victimization (Rusby et al., 2019). The current studies in Hong Kong are yet to be uncovered in terms of conventional school bullying and cyberbullying victimization. However, researchers identified that cyberbullying behaviors and the anonymity of the Internet made it easier for adolescents to engage in cyberbullying activities (Chan & Wong, 2019; Waasdorp et al., 2019; Walker et al., 2019)

Males reported increased perceived self-efficacy, harmony in school, empathy, and belongingness. Social behaviors were higher in females, and girls have a stronger orientation to relationships than boys (Chan et al., 2019; Rusby et al., 2019).

Furthermore, research indicated that victimization is global, the risk is excellent, and victimization tends to be higher in females and White students. Depression, anxiety, substance usage among male adolescents; however, gender differences tend to have mixed outcomes, and some researchers report no gender difference (Diaz et al., 2019; Menin et al., 2021; Reed et al., 2016; Selkie et al., 2016; Watts et al., 2017). Studies also revealed that cyberbullied males often expressed their anger outwardly on females and showed an increased tendency to cyberbully others (Lee & Chun, 2020).

The emotional dependency that developed created issues in reasoning, and the lack of support with online usage tended to affect adolescent psychological wellbeing. Furthermore, Cataldo et al. (2021) identified that passive social media use resulted in aggravated depressive symptoms creating a loss of interest in things, comparing one's wellbeing and loneliness; created by the lack of social support. They questioned the purpose of life, relationships, and their ability to manage reality. Research reported that individuals who experienced cyberbullying become angry, have academic issues, psychological and emotional problems, and are in danger of becoming cyberbullies themselves (Watts et al., 2017). Adolescents become addicted to their social media devices, constantly feeling pressured, worried, or judged by others, creating new anxieties or pre-existing magnifying symptoms because of the intensity of social media networking (Cataldo et al., 2021.)

Coping strategies eased the negative impact on mental health in and out of school. Adolescents, especially girls, internalized issues created by cyberbullying actions, making a lack of coping strategies to help process depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, suicidal ideations, and external problems such as self-harm, aggression, and social issues (Bradbury et al., 2018; Holfeld et al., 2019). Like Bradbury, Holfeld et al. (2019) indicated that cyber victimization was higher in girls leading to more substantial indications of depression. Gender differences played a part in coping with cyberbullying and victimization, and such strategies included coping skills such as seeing social support, distancing, problem-solving, and sometimes retaliating (Bradbury et al., 2018). Gender differences impacted the way adolescents incorporate coping strategies. For instance, females tend to integrate problem-solving for in-person bullying, and males embody distraction and family support for harassment rather than cyber victimization (Bradbury et al., 2018). Little is known on how adolescents positively cope with cyberbullying/victimization; negatively, these individuals cope with negative behaviors such as substance and alcohol usage (Bradbury et al., 2018; Cataldo et al., 2021

**Race.** Regardless of ethnicity, gender, or culture, cyberbullying can affect individuals in one way or another. White students reported a significant percentage of cyberbullying victimization than non-White peers and found that Caucasian adolescents than ethnic minorities higher experienced peer victimization in the United States (Alhajji et al., 2019; Morin et al., 2018). The rate of cyberbullying victimization increased: Black students went from 4% to 17% increase in cyberbullying (Rusby et al., 2019, Jackson et al., 2020; Morin et al., 2018). Hispanic students increased from 6% to 13%, and White

students showed a significant increase from 4% to 42%. Unlike Jackson, researchers Kowalski et al. (2020) identified that African American adolescents experience being the victim and the perpetrator more than any other racial group.

Diversity, ethnicity, gender, race, and culture are not segregated by actions and behaviors associated with cyberbullying classification. Research disparities were found in the study due to cyberbullying classification across cultures, gender, and ethnicity. For instance, some consider being funny; banter and teasing in one group can be perceived as bullying in another group creating mental, physical, social, and behavioral issues globally (Alhajji et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020). As stated before, cyberbullying is a global problem. Therefore, racial/ethnic groups tend to develop their perceptions of worldwide privilege and entitlement, resulting in different pain tolerance when bullied online (Alhajji et al., 2019); Lee et al., 2020). Research indicated that adolescents in South Korea girls were more likely to be prevented from chatting apps, gossiping about, or harassed about their appearance through a technological device (Lee et al., 2020). African American adolescents will experience more race-based victimization in an environment with more diversity and are both perpetrators (Kowalski et al., 2020). Very little evidence is known regarding the White male adolescent and cyberbullying.

### ***Cyberbullying Prevention/Intervention Programs***

The emergence of prevention/intervention programs has been considered to reduce risky behavior from continuing and creating harm. The lack of studies evaluating the effectiveness of cyberbullying interventions lacks in research studies (Calvete et al., 2021). Most programs that have found some point for reducing cyberbullying target

traditional and online bullying issues (Calvete et al., 2021). Although research is scarce, some researchers explored that enhancing the effectiveness of empathy for cyber victims can create an awareness of emotions and responsibility for victims (Mascia et al., 2021). A few studies, such as the ViSC social competence program, the Tabby Improved program, and cyber-friendly school programs, successfully targeted cyberbullying victimization (Mascia et al., 2021; Calvete et al., 2021). Reduced risky behaviors provided educators with the opportunity to evaluate situations in the classroom and create conditions that avoid the consequences of cyberbullying (Mascia et al., 2021; Calvete et al., 2021). Researchers indicated that traditional antibullying intervention programs formulated to help reduce cyberbullying were effective primarily for children to early adolescence and did not create an effective change in adolescent years (Calvete et al., 2021).

Prevention and intervention programs helped protect children and adolescents from becoming victims of such aggression and provide learning opportunities to keep youth safe from harm. The practice of prevention and intervention programs was designed to decrease behaviors and reduce cyberbullying from happening (Ansary et al., 2020; Calvete et al., 2021). Programs that focus on intervention against cyberbullying should be sensitive to diversity and race (Alhajji et al., 2019). Researchers indicated that most prevention intervention programs are universal and are based on theories that include decision-making and generation change through reflective knowledge. Therefore, assuming adolescents receive information about risks, skill training, and education, their behavior can change for the better (Calvete et al., 2021).

### ***Schools & Cyberbullying Prevention***

Evidence-based cyberbullying prevention and intervention programs in schools were beneficial because they kept adolescents from engaging in cyberbullying activities and helped cyber victims cope with bullying's negative impact (Tanrikulu, 2018).

Prevention programs aimed to provide individuals with assistance regarding cyberbullying before cyberbullying occurs, and intervention programs aim to intervene in existing cyberbullying occurrences (Tanrikulu, 2018). Cyberbullying interventions included schools intervening and assisting victims; this type of intervention usually involved teachers who knew about cyberbullying reporting the incident to administrators (Reed et al., 2016). Reed et al. (2016) explained that teachers were less likely to do anything if cyberbullying occurred on school grounds. According to Reed et al. (2016), antibullying intervention programs often address traditional bullying.

Antibullying and cyber safety programs were designed to create empathy and safety for students. A whole-school approach was practical for improving bullying behaviors and helped prevent cyberbullying issues; furthermore, school is ideal for interventions (Adorjan et al., 2019; Brochado et al., 2021). Researchers found that cyberbullying was familiar and disturbing for adolescents creating a perfect setting for school intervention programs to target specific cyberbullying actions and create a safe place for prevention and intervention to decrease bullying and cyberbullying behaviors (Brochado et al., 2021). Unfortunately, several challenges occurred, such as school staff commitment towards programs, student participation, and parents' inability to assist with cyberbullying (Adorjan et al., 2019). Antibullying organizations and researchers

continuously explored opportunities to encourage adolescents to explore coping strategies and strategies to stand up for another and communicate with stakeholders. The Olweus bullying prevention program was designed to provide safe classroom, individual, community, and whole school environments, provide a positive school atmosphere, and improve peer relationships while increasing awareness of bullying (Acosta et al., 2019; Olweus, 2016). This program was designed to reduce school bullying, raise awareness and knowledge about bullying, and provide support and protection for victims (Olweus, 2016).

Understanding how prevention and intervention was utilized and viewed by adolescents increased the programs' efficacy. Designed in Norway, the Olweus bullying prevention program was replicated in South Carolina, creating a positive outcome for intervention for youth, reducing bullying and anti-social behaviors (Olweus, 2016). Studies conducted identified that low self-control and social learning were significantly higher predictors of cyberbullying, creating the perception that there are no rules to follow while online and that moral beliefs were displaced (Li et al., 2016). Researchers suggested that prevention programs would do well if the focus were on what was or were not acceptable behaviors to display while communicating with others online (Li et al., 2016). Li et al. (2016) also explained that demonstrating appropriate behaviors in cyberspace can influence formatting beliefs.

Laws, policies, and regulations provided safety and established positive reinforcement for negative behaviors. Educators and schools offered protective factors to cyberbullying and individuals who perpetrate cyberbullying (Ansary, 2020). Negative

interaction outside of school hours does not always stay at home and can carry on the next day or week during school hours (Ansary, 2020). The availability and access to the Internet every day and at any time enhance the ability for negative behaviors and actions to occur (Ansary, 2020; Espelage et al., 2017; Ioannou et al., 2017; Li et al., 2016; Tanrikulu, 2018). Studies conducted uncovered that school-based prevention and intervention programs suggested that the nature of cyberbullying has been an ongoing issue and should continue to foster a positive school climate (Ansary, 2020; Tanrikulu, 2018). The South Carolina Safe School Climate Act explains that schools will adopt the idea that prevention of harassment, intimidation, and bullying in schools will be prohibited. The school board and teachers will create a safe place for adolescents.

Communication and information tools provided school professionals, parents, and students with positive relationships to be built. South Carolina K-12 School Technology Initiative (2016) incorporated technology usage throughout the Palmetto State, increasing issues outside regular brick and mortar school problems. Since technology is on the rise, so is the complexity of developing issues such as networking, cybersecurity, and one-on-one communication with teachers (South Carolina K-12 Technology Initiative, 2016). Overall, teachers need to be trained and educated on identifying and responding to cyberbullying (Ansary, 2020). Alundag et al. (2020) explained that creating awareness is the first step in prevention and a step in the right direction for cyberbullying intervention to begin. Providing knowledge and understanding of cyberbullying offers teachers, counselors, parents, and other administrators the opportunity to become knowledgeable and vigilant to threats in the cyber world (Alundag et al., 2020).



Furthermore, schools can enforce policies and disciplinary actions that protect cyberbullying behaviors and create adequate punishment for those who display unnecessary cyberbullying steps. Creating a whole school change to create positive student interventions would allow schools to be safer and more supportive for staff and students (Acosta et al., 2019; Mascia et al., 2021; Espelage et al., 2017). Researchers identified that creating a supportive school environment can significantly impact behavior and be effective and lasting. Making such an impact can decrease adverse outcomes such as alcohol usage and violence (Acosta et al., 2019). Addressing school climate can reduce and prevent bullying, creating new policies in schools. Like Acosta, researchers identified that changing awareness and attitudes regarding cyberbullying through school assemblies and software programs can increase adolescents' knowledge about cyberbullying, affecting others (Espelage et al., 2017).

Prevention and intervention programs/workshops can provide positive guidance and support to individuals who have experienced cyberbullying/bullying. Prevention can lead to positive development in students, minimize bullying behavior, and develop better social skills (Acosta et al., 2019). Although some programs showed decreased cyberbullying behaviors, the lack of evidence was scarce. The risk of online grooming was still an issue due to the lack of programs designed to reduce these behaviors (Calvete et al., 2021). Calvete et al. (2021) concluded that the effectiveness of interventions for adolescents was limited, and the decrease in energy was noted due to the increase of age. Researchers are consistently exploring new avenues for prevention and intervention, increasing the approach incorporating rigorous techniques to address specific

psychological processes, and identifying a way to help individuals thrive in all life settings (Calvete et al., 2021; Espelage et al., 2017). Educators and parents need to understand and evaluate the information provided through websites, tip sheets, and online resources (Espelage et al., 2017).

### ***Short-Term Interventions***

Short-term interventions such as the Wise intervention have provided researchers with evidence that short-term interventions create a long-lasting effect and hold the attention of individuals. These interventions are often one-hour long sessions that can make lasting changes in behaviors (Calvete et al., 2021; Espelage et al., 2017). School-based cyberbullying programs need to be addressed on school agendas and teach school adolescents about methods and ways to decrease and prevent cyberbullying from taking place (Tanrikulu, 2018). Also, Wise interventions have created academic improvement and social integration of ethnic minorities and reduced aggression and depression (Calvete et al., 2021). Studies conducted found that focusing on motives rather than behaviors created a more meaningful change for adolescents such as precision, belonging, and self-integrity, providing the individual to focus on these categories rather than be told what to do or how to do it (Calvete et al., 2021).

### ***Programs Around the World***

Various programs were developed to create a wide range of approaches that can make positive actions and decrease adverse outcomes. Researchers have reviewed a combination of these programs, illustrated what has or has not worked, and identified the importance of incorporating evidence-based prevention and intervention (Gaffney et al.,

2019). Cyberbullying programs have been studied across many countries and have included almost twenty publications analyzing the effectiveness of cyberbullying prevention and intervention programs worldwide (Ansary, 2020; Calvete et al., 2021; Gaffney et al., 2019). According to Gaffney et al. (2019), researchers identified the importance of evidence-based intervention and prevention of bullying programs that eventually create cyberbullying prevention; unfortunately, these programs' effectiveness remains unclear. However, researchers continued to evaluate and formulate programs to decrease online risk behaviors in adolescents (Calvete et al., 2021).

### ***Parent/Guardian Involvement in Preventing Cyberbullying***

Parents, guardians, teachers, and other social support influencers need to be aware of cyberbullying antibullying campaigns for the program to be effective. Positive parenting and parental supervision also lead to cyberbullying behaviors (Ansary, 2020; Li et al., 2016). The importance of parent and guardian participation provides clarity and effectiveness for the programs to work due to the fact online cyberbullying takes place while the adolescent is home and the hands-on monitoring that parents provide for prevention and intervention to be effective (Ansary, 2020; Li et al., 2016). Parents can provide children and adolescents with confidence and protective knowledge about cyberbullying that can last for decades. Parental supervision at an early age helps engage children in good and appropriate behaviors while online (Ansary, 2020). Parents' hands-on monitoring, consistent mediation, checking teens' social media profiles, phones, and texts will decrease the chance of cyberbullying from affecting them negatively (Ansary, 2020; Chang et al., 2016).

Parental mediation can be an essential aspect of helping adolescents navigate technology and negative issues. Parents can provide knowledge and prevention tips and teach children to appropriate online behaviors and interventions when cyberbullying happens (Ansary, 2020). Similar research by Chang et al. concluded that parental interaction and mediation could limit risk and harm (2016). Parents can help adolescents understand the importance of blocking unwanted users who post harmful and hurtful things and instruct youth about adequate and appropriate internet usage; however, the research identified that adolescents are not as prone to use social support from family (Ansary, 2020; Bradbury et al., 2018). Increased mitigation and increased supervision can provide adolescents with the opportunity to decrease risk factors that arise while online (Wright, 2017).

Prevention and intervention strategies can reduce the impact of negative actions if bullying programs are provided and effective. Although not all bullying or cyberbullying youth commit or contemplate taking their own lives or experience any damaging alternatives, much needs to be done in our communities to protect and educate our youth. Cyberbullying is a problem in adolescents' lives. It is essential to help them cope sufficiently and successfully by incorporating positive prevention and intervention coping skills relevant to success (Bradbury et al., 2018). We must provide safety and resources that encourage and motivate the child to stand up for themselves and others (Bradbury et al., 2018; Hinduja et al., 2018). Researchers Hinduja and Patchin (2018) and Bradbury et al. (2018) believed that programs are created to reduce: the risk of suicide; increase adult interaction; teach positive copings strategies; promote the acceptability of oneself, and

acceptability of seeking help, then the youth will become stronger and have a clearer understanding of bullying.

### **Summary**

Chapter two presented a review of past research regarding issues with cyberbullying. Chapter two provided an overview of the theoretical framework utilized in this study, including the development of the social development theory, components, and importance of social and virtual interactions among adolescents. An explanation of cyberbullying defined, cyberbullying vs. traditional bullying, conceptualization, victim outcomes of traditional and cyberbullying, demographics of cyberbullying including a breakdown of Age, Gender, and Race will be addressed. Cyberbullying Prevention and intervention programs were incorporated, and a detailed account of short-term interventions, programs around the world, and how parent/guardian involvement was addressed. I created an opportunity for readers to grasp the intensity of cyberbullying and the severity of this widespread and global issue. Past research on prevention and intervention programs and the influences that these programs have on adolescents' personal and academic lives was addressed. Bullying dates to the early 1970s and has since become an ongoing issue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with aggressive behavior and intention to harm one another, now creating bullying issues in the cyber world (Menin et al., 2021).

Chapter two addressed the ongoing problem of cyberbullying and the severity of the issue mentally, emotionally, and psychologically on adolescents. This chapter addressed cyberbullying conceptualization, the nature of cyberbullying victimization, and prevention/intervention program success. This study addressed the experiences of White

male adolescents who had exposure to cyberbullying prevention/intervention programs in the school. Cyberbullying negatively impacted all adolescents' psychological, physical, and social wellbeing, regardless of whether they are victims or perpetrators (Dennehy et al., 2020). Although numerous studies explored the prevalence of the problem, few studies indicated if prevention/intervention programs are helpful for White male adolescents living in a rural community.

This literature review identified that White male youth lacked in most studies on prevention and intervention programs' effectiveness and significance. As indicated in Chapter Two, the gender gap of indirect bullying and spreading rumors was demonstrated by female involvement more than males. Males tend to act on direct bullying, such as physical altercations (Alhajji et al., 2019). The exclusion in research provided a gap for further research to be explored. Therefore, this study was designed to address the gap. However, research has been productive in identifying the risks, prevalence, and definition. Little is still known regarding the evaluation and coping strategies for managing experiences of cyber-victimization in race and gender (Bradbury et al., 2018). Adolescent issues can be extreme in and out of the classroom requiring a complex and comprehensive approach to addressing cyberbullying issues effectively (Acosta et al., 2019).

Chapter three identified the research question, research design, the purpose of this study, and rationale for choosing a generic qualitative study to explore experiences of White adolescents living in a rural community with exposure to cyberbullying and prevention/intervention programs. Furthermore, I addressed the role of the researcher,

including issues with trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and possible researcher biases.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the experiences and perceptions that White rural males have about cyberbullying programs they were in when they were adolescents. In this chapter, details regarding the rationale for implementing a generic qualitative study are addressed. I also detail the researcher's role and discuss the population, the sampling strategy, number of participants, procedures in which participants were identified and recruited, and the relationship between saturation and sample size. Furthermore, Chapter 3 explains the study's trustworthiness, steps taken to minimize harm to all participants, and ethical issues/guidelines.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

The research question for this study was "What are the experiences and perceptions of White rural males of cyberbullying prevention/intervention programs that they were involved in when adolescents?" The central phenomenon was the experiences and perceptions that White rural males have about cyberbullying programs they were in when adolescents. The research tradition utilized for this study was a generic qualitative approach. I used a generic qualitative approach to understand how individuals explained their own experiences and how that experience affected them (see Kennedy, 2016). A generic qualitative inquiry also provided flexibility and aligned with individual assumptions and interpretive lenses, which is essential for quality research (Liu, 2016; Kennedy, 2016).

Qualitative research has philosophical traditions that include phenomenology, constructivism, and pragmatism (Yardley, 2016). Qualitative research answers what and



how reflecting on the phenomenon of an event or narrative of how individuals interact (Jamali., 2018; Jameel et al., 2018; Johansson, 2019). Unlike quantitative research, which studies the meaning of something, qualitative research is used to explore individuals' experiences, perspectives, and perceptions (Jameel et al., 2018). Hence, I used a qualitative approach to understand the experiences and perceptions that White rural males have about cyberbullying programs they were in when adolescents.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of a qualitative researcher involves acknowledging the personal interactions with participants, the collection of data, and how the researcher interprets the findings of the research (Karagiozis, 2018). My role as the researcher was an observer listener and gathered information based on the lived experiences of the individual being interviewed. My role required me to do no harm, be diligent, and provide truthful, not biased, and nonjudgmental research. Researchers need to be aware of their own culturally formed consciousness to prevent their values from being interpreted into participants' conversations (Karagiozis, 2018). Due to the sensitivity of the research, investigators need to be sensitive to the nature of the study, merge empowerment, and engage participants in the design (Jameel et al., 2018; Yardley, 2016). To control bias, I journaled thoughts and feelings associated with the study to decrease biased opinions.

It was also essential to identify any personal and professional relationships the researcher had with participants. For this research, I conducted interviews with individuals who do not have any affiliation with me. By doing this, I maintained boundaries within the context of the study. Recruitment occurred in a rural community

outside of my residence to assert that there was no conflict of interest.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

#### ***Population***

The population utilized for this study was White males ages 18–30 years of age who were exposed to cyberbullying prevention education programs in a rural South Carolina area when they were adolescents. According to the World Health Organization (Adolescent Health, n.d.), adolescents are 10–19 years of age. More than 90% of adolescents in the United States reported being online daily, with over 70% of those youth incorporating two social media platforms at one time, leading to approximately 56% of that youth reporting being cyberbullied (Alhajji et al., 2019). I recruited participants over the age of 18 as they were able to reflect on their experiences with cyberbullying programs and provide information about how those programs worked (or did not work) to address issues surrounding cyberbullying when they were adolescents.

#### ***Sampling Strategy & Sample Size***

**Sampling Strategy.** The sampling strategy proposed for this study was a purposeful convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Participants for a survey were selected based on pre-selected criteria obtained by the research question, which identified specific characteristics of the population being studied (Etikan, 2016; Kalu, 2019).

Purposeful sampling was utilized to determine participants for this study who experienced cyberbullying and participated in prevention or intervention resources in a rural community of White males 18–30 years of age. This group of individuals are less

vulnerable and should have the ability to meaningfully reflect on their experiences and perceptions about cyberbullying programs they were in when adolescents. One challenge or weakness of purposeful sampling is determining the adequate sample range and explaining the procedure for selection (Naderifar et al., 2017; Etikan et al., 2016).

Convenience sampling is a type of sampling considered nonprobability or nonrandom sampling where participants fit a study's specific criteria and are easily accessible and willing to participate in the study (Emerson, 2021; Etikan et al., 2016). The one weakness of convenience sampling is that the results from the study may lack generalizability since the sample is not random as individuals self-select to volunteer for the study (Emerson, 2021; Etikan et al., 2016). Utilizing snowball sampling allowed me to access more participants as those who participate may know others who meet the inclusion criteria. Snowball sampling is a gradual method that researchers use to gather information to access specific groups of people (Naderifar et al., 2017). Snowball sampling can be applied when accessing subjects with characteristics required for the study purpose (Naderifar et al., 2017). I posted recruitment materials in places where the population I attempted to recruit can be accessed. Individuals contacted me if they believed that they met the criteria for the study and wanted to participate.

### ***Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria***

The inclusion criteria to participate in this study are:

- 18-30 years of age
- White male
- From a rural community in South Carolina

- Experienced cyberbullying at some point between the ages of 15–18 years old (includes personal experience, perpetrator, bystander/witness)
- Experience with cyberbullying prevention/intervention programs at some point between the ages of 15–18 years old
- Willing to share experiences and perceptions about cyberbullying and the prevention/intervention programs they participated in

Exclusion criteria are that the individual does not meet one or more of the listed inclusion criteria.

### ***Sample Size & Saturation***

The anticipated sample size needed for this study was eight to 15 participants. A sample size of eight is appropriate for qualitative research if saturation is reached (Malterud et al., 2016; Saunders et al., 2018). Saturation demonstrates why data collection can be discontinued in a qualitative study (Saunders et al., 2018). Researchers can reach saturation when the researcher does not receive any more information from the participants to add to the developed theory (Malterud et al., 2016; Saunders et al., 2018). I communicated with my chair and shared interview recordings, transcripts, and initial coding of data to help me determine if I reached saturation and completed data collection or if additional interviews needed to be completed.

### ***Recruitment***

Once IRB approval was received (IRB approval # 04-01-22-0276865), I recruited participants for the study. Participants were identified and contacted by posting the recruitment flyer within the rural community of South Carolina and utilization of

Facebook groups. I posted the flyer at a local library, local coffee shops, a community center, and a community college with permission. Facebook groups included Victims of Bullying, Cyberbullying public group, and a Central South Carolina community group.

Once the potential participants contacted me about their desire to participate, I emailed or asked (depending on communication) them demographic questions to determine if they meet the criteria (Appendix C). If they answered yes to all the inclusion questions, I emailed them a copy of the informed consent. In that email I asked them to review the attached informed consent form and respond to that email with the words “I consent” if they give informed consent. I let them know that their participation was voluntary, and it was ok if they chose not to participate. In that email, I provided dates/times that were available to hold the interview so that they indicated what would work for them if they consented to participate. Additional resource information was provided to participants at the time of consent if they had any adverse effects, discomforts, or concerns participating in the study.

Once the participant indicated that they consented to participate and provided me with a date/time that worked for them to be interviewed I emailed them a confirmation email. The confirmation email contained the date, time, and zoom link if that was the preferred method of communication. If the participant asked to interview by phone, the phone call was recorded using TapeACall, recording and transcribing the telephone call. The recording only contained audio (no video).

## **Instrumentation**

### ***Demographic Questions***

Demographic questions provided the researcher with assistance in gathering a description of my sample, which was provided in chapter 4. The demographic question is in the interview protocol (see Appendix B).

### ***Interview Questions***

A semistructured interview was used, and the questions were open-ended, which allowed participants to share details about their experiences. Interview prompts provided if further explanation was needed to gather additional information (see Appendix B).

## **Data Collection**

Due to COVID-19, I conducted interviews via Zoom (audio only), or telephone call recorded using TapeACall. Participants were asked to find a quiet, private setting to ensure confidentiality. I made sure I was in an area where others could not overhear. After the recording was started at the beginning of the interview, I asked the participant if they still consented to participate and had any questions about the informed consent or study. I ensured that the interviews, recordings, transcripts etc., were kept confidential. I answered any questions that they had.

If the interviewee became distressed at any time during the interview, I ended the discussion and provided a warm referral to a professional who provided support resources and guidance (See Appendix E). I explained that the resources can help find free or low-cost assistance. This information was provided to the client during the interview if needed or after the consultation by email or text.

I then asked the demographic questions (see Appendix B), provided prompts as needed. After completing the demographic questions, I went through the interview questions (Appendix B). Field notes were written down during the interview and added to the data collection. The field notes were provided specific code letters for each conducted interview. I also incorporated reflexivity to explore my role as the researcher and identified my relationship or thoughts on the study. Throughout the data collection process, I journaled thoughts, feelings, or reactions that arose during and after the interview process.

Once the interview was completed, I thanked the participant for volunteering and asking questions. Again, I explained that the 20.00 visa gift card would be emailed in the provided resource information. I transcribed the recordings via Zoom for interviews completed in that platform and utilized Otter.ai software to transcribe phone interviews. I listened to the interview recordings while reading the transcript to ensure accuracy.

I emailed participants a copy of their transcript and asked them to return any corrections within 7 days of the send date of the email. I also disseminated a 1-page summary of my study to each of my participants after I received CAO sign off. Member checks allow researchers to enhance the validity of research findings and help establish credibility (Shufutinsky, 2020; Thomas, 2017). Member checking will enable participants to review their transcript to confirm accuracy and credibility.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Data was analyzed using an inductive analytical approach to develop themes from individual responses. The utilization of an inductive approach utilized as the researcher

began collecting data, then incorporated the data to identify emerging themes among all the participant's interviews (Azungah, 2018; Castleberry et al., 2018). I included a thematic analysis (TA) format that which allowed the researcher to build a complex, natural view of what is happening, gather data, and create workable themes (Castleberry et al., 2018). TA helped me accurately identify, analyze, and report pieces within the data. An inductive approach utilized detailed information and data from the participant's experience to form concepts and themes (Azungah, 2018).

First, I compiled the data into usable information by individual coding responses to determine more prominent themes derived from those statements. This collection was done by pieces or phrases that are similar and then grouped (Theophilus, 2018). Once this was completed, I organized the information into an Excel spreadsheet to help with the organization and consistency of the data (Castleberry et al., 2018). I collected and separated the themes into meaningful groups. This grouping was utilized by coding the material into similar broader ideas (Castleberry et al., 2018; Theophilus, 2018). I then incorporated a coding method such as descriptive coding to identify the role of cyberbullying, the process or action of the prevention or intervention programs the use of phrases or exact words from the participants (Theophilus, 2018). I began the process of coding using NVivo to restructure the data and validate what was collected; however, I incorporated MAXQDA to restructure the data and validate what was collected (Castleberry et al., 2018)—reaching a common denominator that provided information to support my research question.



## **Issues of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

Credibility was established by incorporating a variety of strategies to create unbiased, credible, and trustworthy information. Demonstrating sensitivity to the context is valuable and can be articulated by showing awareness to individuals' perspectives, the context of the research in terms of sociocultural, language, and how all these aspects influence what participants say and how the researcher interprets (Stewart et al., 2017; Yardley, 2017). Credibility can be reached by demonstrating a rich, thick, and detailed account of the information provided by the participant without biases (Amankwaa, 2016; Shufutinsky, 2020; Stewart et al., 2017). Various techniques incorporated in qualitative research will help this researcher assure credible and reliable information, such as peer debriefing, member checking, and notetaking (Amankwaa, 2016; Stewart et al., 2017).

### **Transferability**

Like external validity in a quantitative study, transferability is the degree to which information from an investigation can be applied to other perspectives (Yardley, 2017). I will provide thick and rich descriptions of the data, and a detailed account of it collected and analyzed. Thick description can describe the behavior and experiences and the context so that these experiences become meaningful to others (Korstjens et al., 2018). Applicability is also known as transferability, and as a researcher, it is our responsibility to provide a thick description of our participants and the research process (Korstjens et al., 2018; Yardley, 2017). I will tell a complete story with specific details, accomplished through journaling and detailed records (Amankwaa, 2016). Describing the trend in

sufficient detail will help evaluate the extent to which conclusions are drawn that are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people (Amankwaa, 2016).

### **Dependability**

Dependability is the qualitative counterpart to reliability which includes consistency. Dependability can be established by incorporating an inquiry audit technique (Korstjens et al., 2018). Inquiry audits are conducted by having a researcher not involved in the research process (Amankwaa, 2016). Researchers need to evaluate the accuracy of the data assess whether the findings, interpretation, and conclusion are supported by the data being investigated (Amankwaa, 2016). An audit trail will include appropriate consent forms, IRB approval, and interview questions to ensure accuracy and effectiveness. Consistency is also vital for a dependable study; therefore, participants will be asked the same open-ended questions. Journaling is another strategy that will be incorporated to incorporate dependability. Amankwaa (2016) explained that journaling is the first date a decision is made to begin researching and end when the research is completed. Journaling will allow me to reflect on what has occurred during the interview and research process and identify any preconceived notions or biases I may have had.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is the counterpart to objectivity in qualitative research. For confirmability to be established, researchers can utilize a few strategies to ensure confirmability, such as confirmability audits, audit trail, triangulation, journaling, and reflexivity (Amankwaa, 2016; Korstjen et al., 2018). Korstjen et al. (2018) explained that an audit trail is a transparent description of research steps from the start of the research to

the development and reporting of research findings. Confirmability is neutral in which research findings can define research findings (Amankwaa, 2016). Data and interpretations are accurate and not fragmented of the questioner's imagination (Korstjen et al., 2018). Raw data collected includes written field notes, summaries, unobstructed documents, condensed notes (Korstjen et al., 2018). Incorporating multiple data sources within an investigation can enhance the understanding of the study; this is called triangulation (Amankwaa, 2016; Korstjen et al., 2018). I will incorporate journaling and reflexivity to ensure that data is based on facts and not biases. This form of confirmability will allow me to stay focused and accurate to the material and data presented without forming biases regarding cyberbullying programs.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Once IRB approval was granted, I recruited participants for my study and obtained informed consents from each volunteer either by phone or email (Appendix B). The informed consent was emailed to participants and reviewed during the first initial call. A list of resources was provided for additional support if needed (Appendix E). Participants can leave the study at any time. If a participant wants to end the interview, taping will stop, I provided them the list of resources, and thank them for volunteering.

Incentives were utilized in this study. Those who participated were given a USD 20 VISA gift card even if they withdrew from the study after participating in at least part of the interview. The gift card was a thank you for participating and appreciation. This was a small incentive, so it did not result in any ethical issues.

I ensured that specific demographic information about the participant was not

compromised by ensuring that participants were not identified (reported in aggregate). Utilization of pseudonyms throughout chapters 4 and 5 where provided such as interview quotes to ensure confidentiality. Informed consents, recordings, transcripts, field notes, and any other raw data was kept in a locked cabinet or on a password-protected computer, and the only individuals who had access was the researcher, committee members, and members of the IRB (IRB access if requested). Data will be destroyed five years after CAO approval per university guidelines.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 3, I provided and reviewed the purpose of this research study, central concepts, and rationale for the design selected. I decided that a generic qualitative approach was appropriate for my research study. My role as the researcher, methodology, instrumentation, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures for the analysis were addressed. Chapter 4 provided a brief review of the purpose and research questions and a detailed account of data collection. I provided an overview of how many participants from each data type were collected—a description of the location, frequency, and duration of data collection and recording the data. The coding process and themes collected during the data analysis will be detailed. Evidence of trustworthiness and results of the data will be addressed and discussed in detail regarding research findings.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the experiences of White rural males between the ages of 18–30 who experienced cyberbullying prevention and intervention programs when they were between the ages of 15–18. The research question used for this generic qualitative study was “What are the experiences and perceptions of White rural males of cyberbullying prevention/intervention programs they were involved in when adolescents?” Chapter 4 provides an overview of the setting personal or organizational conditions that may have influenced participants on their experience at the time of the study. Chapter 4 also includes information on sample demographics, data collection, data analyses completed, and a discussion of the evidence of trustworthiness. Also included in this chapter is a discussion of the results and summary.

### **Setting**

Individual interviews were conducted via Zoom or telephone (audio only) depending on which method worked for the participant. Only two participants chose a Zoom interview, and the other six participants chose phone as their option. Participants were allowed to select the day and time that worked best for their schedule and personal needs. I conducted each interview in a private, secure location free from any outside interference, providing a confidential setting for the interview. Each interview ranged from 30 minutes to 45 minutes. I did not encounter any personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experience at the time of the study that influenced the interpretation of the study results.

### Demographics

I interviewed eight participants for this study. The demographics of the sample are in Table 1. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 27. Of the eight participants 25% were cyberbullied by someone else and 87.5% of participants indicated that they attended a cyberbullying program through their school. One participant (12.5%) participated in a cyberbullying program more than once, and six (75%) indicated that their participation in a cyberbullying program was not voluntary. Each participant was given a pseudonym that was arranged from I-1 through 1-8. Table 2 contains the demographics by pseudonym of participant.

**Table 1**

*Sample Demographics*

	Category	N	% Of Sample
Current age	18	5	62.5
	19	2	25.0
	27	1	12.5
Cyberbullied someone else	Yes	2	25.0
	No	6	75.0
Type of cyberbullying program offered	At School	7	87.5
	Online	1	12.5
Participated more than once in cyberbullying program	Yes	1	12.5
	No	7	87.5
Participation in cyberbullying program voluntary	Yes	2	25.0
	No	6	75.0

**Table 2***Participant Demographics by Pseudonym*

Participant pseudonym	Current Age	Cyberbullied someone else	Type of cyberbullying program offered	Participated more than once in cyberbullying program	Participation in cyberbullying program voluntary
I-1	18	N	School	Y	Y
1-2	19	N	Online	N	N
1-3	27	N	School	N	N
1-4	18	N	School	N	Y
1-5	18	Y	School	N	N
1-6	18	Y	School	N	N
1-7	19	N	School	N	N
1-8	18	N	School	N	N

**Data Collection**

I started recruitment approximately 4 weeks after receiving IRB approval. I recruited following the recruitment plan outlined in Chapter 3. Interviews started coming slowly ranging from 2–6 weeks. I originally proposed that interviews would take approximately 60–90 minutes; however, participants were concise, detailed, and able to answer the semistructured questions and follow-up questions in a shorter time.

Data were recorded using Otter AI or Tape a Call depending upon the method used to initiate the semi structured interview. Six of the interviews were recorded using tape a call and then transferred into Otter ai for additional transcription. Two of the interviews were conducted through Zoom and Otter AI was used to transcribe the call. Participants were provided the opportunity to add remarks about their cyberbullying experience and prevention or intervention programs at the end of the call. The only unusual circumstance encountered in data collection was how long it took for interviews

to occur. Probing questions were used when needed, however, I found that only three out of the eight interviews needed the probing questions. The other five were very detailed in their responses and often went into the other question. Only one participant was soft spoken and needed time to evaluate each question with pauses. The other seven were open to answer the questions and add additional comments. I did not have to reach out to any of the participants for clarity or additional thoughts or review.

### **Data Analysis**

Once my interviews were finished, I began reviewing the transcribed interviews from Otter.ai, naming each interview and saving it to a file on my computer. I manually began coding each interview. I began collecting data from each interview by taking each interview question and response, finding the common theme that emerged from the data. Each interview was transcribed, read, and re-read, while highlighting keywords and themes. Incorporating thematic analysis provided me with the ability to identify and analyze themes from participants who have experienced cyberbullying prevention and intervention programs while in high school. Reading the interviews provided the ability to find emerging codes and themes from the participant's responses (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022).

Data were moved inductively from coded units to larger representations of individual experiences of cyberbullying and their participation in a cyberbullying prevention program which then included categories and themes utilizing an inductive analytical approach. Including a thematic analysis (TA) format provided me with the ability to build a complex, natural view of what was happening, gather data and create



workable themes from each answer (Azungah, 2018; Castleberry et al., 2018). Reading the interviews provided the ability to find emerging codes and themes from the participants' responses (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022).

During my interview process and evaluation of transcripts, I made sure I was open with no judgment or biases. This step was important for consistency and accuracy. My notes, highlights, and journaling that were gathered through this process aligned with quotes, codes, themes, and categories which helped me understand the lived experiences of cyberbullying and prevention/ intervention programs.

I started a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with the initial coding and examples to help organize similar data from each interview. This spreadsheet helped me identify my first set of codes. I started with each question, broke down the meaning of each one and explored similar thoughts from each interview. Once this step was completed, I tried to incorporate the data into NVivo. However, I switched to incorporating the data from the interviews into MAXQDA. Using MAXQDA helped me to collect additional information and collectively identify different relationships in the data. This step helped me create codes by incorporating first impressions of the data from everyone's responses. I incorporated an inductive approach to collect the data and identify emerging themes among all the participants interviews, similar experiences, and phrases (Castleberry et al., 2018; Theophilus, 2018). Compiling usable data from individual responses to more prominent themes from the statements were then grouped and identified by terms or phrases by the eight participants. Continually throughout each interview, participants shared they were taunted, shamed, and did not experience very much support.

As I stated in Chapter 3, I compiled the data into usable information starting with each question and color-coding each participant's response to determine more prominent themes from each statement. Grouping similar phrases or words together in an Excel spreadsheet provided me with the ability to find consistent and common data (Castleberry et al., 2018; Theophilus, 2018). Specific codes, categories, and themes emerged from the data. I incorporated an Excel spreadsheet first to track data and then incorporated the data into MAXQDA software to find the themes and categories. As I was inputting the data and utilizing the software, I used reflexivity, taking notes of my thoughts, and actions during the coding period.

The codes derived from the data included definition, mind, action, prevention, school, personal issue, parents support, cyberbullying prevented, prevention program, do well, not do well, and helpful. Once the codes were created, categories were developed such as definition, own experiences on the effects and prevention of cyberbullying, advice about telling someone and not giving into the negative words experience, school prevention, parents/guardian's response, prevention ideas and meaning, program participation/ well and not well, personal meaning, the result of cyberbullying, and future help. Table 3 illustrates examples of initial coding as well as example quotes from participants. I then continued to write my conclusions and findings.

**Table 3***Examples of Initial Coding*

Initial Code	Examples of Quotes
Definition	negative way to harm others, making fun of them, making someone feel bad about self, anonymous message
Mind Action	body shaming, harm against your personality- making someone feel imperfect being called rude names and different comments to do hurtful stuff, insulting, sending harmful messages or pictures you're dumb, you're ugly, you're stupid
Prevention	stand up for friend, go to police, if you see someone or know someone being cyberbullied step in and help, listen, be support, remove the person from social media, support from teachers, parents
School	presented awareness information- did not enforce it well enough, only prevented it for a week or two before going back to normal, not well- never any anti-bullying measures, not enough resources
Personal Issue	took a toll on mental health, large amount of day spent thinking about negative stuff; phrasing of words is the issue, severely bullied in high school, got rid of most of social media, slight issue, others tried to bring me down, make me feel bad, created mental health issues for me
Parents Support	I told my parents, we talk about it in our home, and my parents took steps to talk to the school and let them know it was happening, they did not know, they knew I had mental health issues but not cyberbullied, my mom did not know, in my house we were supposed to leave feelings alone,
Cyberbullying Prevented	Didn't have access to a phone, creating a dialogue with kids, telling them that your words do affect people; allowing kids to work with others outside of their normal friend group, more information, support, letting us know it's okay, ways to cope
Prevention Program	PowerPoints on the effects and prevention of cyberbullying, advice about telling someone and not giving into the negative words, bring awareness to cyberbullying, but did not effective on addressing cyberbullying or stopping it,
Do well	bring awareness to cyberbullying; did not follow advice instead bottled everything up, put posters up, guidelines to stay safe online, media safety tools,
Do not do well	not being supportive enough on the individual level, acknowledge cyberbullying and then be done with it, act like it wasn't happening, only one program, did not follow through, no impact, not long enough, no follow up
Helpful	Direct kids toward a better direction, show them their value, more outreach, more resources, let everyone know that this happens to everyone and there is support

Utilizing descriptive coding helped me restructure and mark out words or phrases that were unnecessary. I incorporated descriptive coding to identify the role of cyberbullying and the process or action of the prevention and intervention programs that all eight participants identified using words or phrases (Theophilus, 2018). Table 4 provides examples of descriptive coding and examples of quotes provided by all eight participants. This table helped me develop themes from categories and descriptive meanings. Categories were developed based on the data recorded by participants' experiences of cyberbullying and prevention or intervention programs in rural high schools through the interviewing process.

**Table 4***Examples of Descriptive Coding*

Descriptive Code	Examples of Quotes
Definition	Using any sort of technology or social media to make fun or put someone down, bullying in general, shaming, harassing being rude or hurtful to anyone, using communication over the internet, harass online
Own experiences on the effects and prevention of cyberbullying	Body shame, self-doubt, quit playing certain games to avoid running into people online, experienced a lot of cyberbullying threat messages on Instagram, issues for my friends, I listened and felt bad for him, create mental health issues in me, severely bullied in school and online, tell me to kill self, never be good enough, sending nasty threats, mean text messages, took a tool on my mental health, large part of the day spent thinking about negative stuff, phrasing of words is the issue
Advice about telling someone not to give into the negative words, experience	Limit interaction, tell someone, reach out to others, talk to a counselor, reach out to someone for therapy, there is support out there, help others feel safe, reassure each other, check in, talk to parents
School Prevention	Homeschooled parents very protective, prohibited online interaction with other users, felt like the school did the bare minimum, had a class to discuss cyberbullying, would have school email where some words would be flagged, not good, only one program very little about cyberbullying, not well, more of intervention, it was futile effort in trying to stop kids from posting things,
Parent/guardian response	Parents did not know it was happening, never told them, found a way to handle on my own, did not tell them, encouraged not to do it towards someone or use social media as a weapon, did not know it was happening, responded poorly, told to get off social media, did not know, told to handle things on my own, we never talked about things I told my parents, we talked about it in our home, and my parents took steps to talk to the school, my mom did not know, I thought I could handle it on my own, they did not know, they knew I had mental health issues but not cyberbullied.
Prevention ideas and meaning	Does not think it can be prevented, technology is so readily available, effective education in place, academic administration counselors dedicated to kids have not been cyberbullied, getting information out there, talking about the same issue, have the tools to help others, listen to them, prevented a lot by parents, lower time spent on social media, talk more face to face, Block social media platforms
Program participation/ well and not well	PowerPoints on the effects and prevention of cyberbullying, advice about telling someone and not giving in, had an assembly, talked about the issue, counselors available, only one program, did well bring awareness, did not follow up or offer advice, gave us resources, numbers to call, put up posters, did not acknowledge cyberbullying and then be done with it, act as if it wasn't happening, Did not make it long enough, standardized everything
Personal meaning	Using any sort of technology or social media to make fun of or put someone down, bullying in general, any form of bullying that is done on social platform, any kind of bullying that doesn't take place face to face, bullying someone online over social media, insta and snapchat, text messages, threats, negative way to harm others, making fun of them, making someone feel bad about self, anonymous message others experiences, self-doubt, target someone or harass online,
The result of cyberbullying	Quit playing certain games, experienced a lot of cyberbullying, mental health issues, felt bad about self
Future help	Improve on trying to not standardize everything, see that each kid is different and unique, make it personal for the people running the programs, define cyberbullying, putting a label on it to make it real and understandable, Direct kids toward a better direction, show them their value

I continued to explore the data until I could not come up with any other details or themes. This was the point that I concluded that saturation was met. Saturation of data was met when with eight participants and all details created the same outcome and data. Details and information became repetitive, and the same theme was emerging each time.

### **Themes Derived**

Five themes were derived from the data and included: 1) Importance of Personal Experiences in Understanding of Cyberbullying; 2) There are Negative Outcomes of Cyberbullying; 3) Inadequacy of Cyberbullying Prevention/Intervention Programs; 4) Ongoing Adult Support is Important; and 5) Schools are Important & Need to Improve Their Approach to Cyberbullying Prevention.

#### ***Theme 1: Importance of Personal Experiences in Understanding of Cyberbullying***

The theme from the first question provided me with the ability to identify the meaning of personal experiences with cyberbullying. Many of the participants expressed that they had access to some type of technology whether a computer, cell phone or gaming system which provided them with access to individuals other than friends and family. Seven of the participants expressed that the cyberbullying happened over some type of social media platform such as Instagram or snapchat. One participant expressed he experienced cyberbullying during an online video game. A commonality among participants was that using any sort of technology or social media platform such as Instagram, Snapchat, text messages to make fun of, harm, or make someone feel bad or put down someone was what they considered cyberbullying. Participants expressed their

personal experiences of being cyberbullied while attending a rural high school.

Interviewee 3 (I-3) stated that when he hears the word cyberbullying, he reflects on how other people don't think it is as severe as it is Interviewee 4 (I-4) stated, "I see a lot of cyberbullying just in like video games just the anonymity that it provides." Others stated that as threats to others, body shaming, making someone feel bad about themselves created negative unwanted thoughts or feelings. Participants were able to express personal frustrations and negativity that came from their own experience of cyberbullying from anonymous individuals. Interviewee 8 (I-8) expressed that he knew the individual that bullied him online, however, was unaware of other comments that followed his bully's posts.

### ***Theme 2: There are Negative Outcomes of Cyberbullying***

The outcomes of cyberbullying for my participants included avoidance of others, quitting games online to avoid people, and the lack of confidence in oneself. Many of the participants indicated that anonymous individuals posed threats, sent harmful messages or pictures, and did or said hurtful things to make the participant feel shame. Interviewee I-1 stated, "I was told I was dumb, ugly, and stupid which made it difficult to focus and concentrate on schoolwork." Interviewee I-4 stated that group chats with people were difficult and experienced which individuals would send harmful pictures or harmful like messages and stuff like that. Interviewee I-5 stated that he was a bystander to a lot of cyberbullying, and

it made me feel scared for them because I was hanging out with them at the time and someone threatened them, the bully said they were going to go to this place

and kill them; I was really scared for them and for me.

Cyberbullying, and the negativity and negative actions that result increases during adolescent years (Dennehy et al., 2020). The increase of repetitive actions negatively impacts adolescents' emotional and mental health (Feijoo et al., 2021). Individuals who participated in my study noted that they were shamed, put down, called nasty words on Snap Chat or Instagram from others. One participant noted that he quit going to high school and enrolled in a different school due to how intense the cyberbullying was on him emotionally.

Participants indicated that they felt hurt, betrayed, and let down. Three of the participants in this study suffered from depression due to being cyberbullied in high school, internalizing feelings, and frustration. Interviewee 3 (I-3) stated that he was extremely bullied on Facebook and tumbler. He stated,

It was extremely severe. By the time I was in my senior year of high school, I had an IEP an independent education plan and had to quit the JROTC program at my school just to get away from people. I had to stop using my social media, I just got rid of it. And then, you know, just as a personal impact, I was significantly harmed.

This was similar to the experience of interviewee 7 (I-7) who stated individuals would leave anonymous messages for me on my story or snap and would say negative things about me; about my looks about my height, especially about my weight or just things that really made me feel bad about myself and it kind of hurt a lot at the time. I would feel alone and that no one was in my corner.



***Theme 3: Inadequacy of Cyberbullying Prevention/Intervention Programs***

The prevention or intervention programs that the participants completed offered very little help and assistance with the experience of cyberbullying. Most of the participants expressed that prevention could be helped if academic administration and counselors showed dedication to those who have been or are being cyberbullying. Others stated that it would be helpful to lower the amount of time spent on social media and talk face to face more. Participants in this study also expressed that little information was shared on how to prevent cyberbullying and the programs did not make much of a difference.

Take for instance the personal experience experienced by Interviewee I-3 who shared:

There was never any, you know, anti-bullying education, and cyber bullying never even brought up. It was never even a thought at the time when I was being educated and going through these anti bullying programs. Like I said, in the beginning, a lot of it is always the same thing happening on school grounds. I was told “It’s out of our hands and there were no resources.” There are not strong preventative resources out there.

This sentiment was shared with Interviewee I-4 stating:

honestly, I really don’t know if we can prevent it. You know, kids these days...my parents were learning computers when they were fortyand I was learning them when I was four. Technology and specifically the internet is available to us at so much earlier ages. extremely young, like I know the internet

was really coming around when I was growing up and it was really being like getting big on like the early 2000s and I saw stuff on the internet that I should not have seen that. I just think that the more we grow, the more information is going to be told to us at an earlier age. So, with prevention and stuff like that, I think that it is a difficult thing to do because we are we are given these tools literally like you need a phone and laptop now. I feel like no matter what, we are always going to be confronted with that. wealth of information just because of how prevalent it is in our society. I really think preventing cyber bullying is really, really a hard task.

Most of these participants found it difficult to prevent cyberbullying and expressed that prevention could only really be prevented if you step in and help, provided support in that moment. They did say as well that removing oneself from social media could help. The participants expressed that prevention could be managed if academic administration and counselors showed dedication to those who have been or are being cyberbullied. The incorporation of prevention and intervention programs are designed to decrease behaviors and reduce cyberbullying from happening (Ansary et al., 2020; Calvete et al., 2021). However, a theme that developed with my participants is that they believed that prevention can be a tricky thing to do because adolescents are provided tools such as a phone and laptop where most of the cyberbullying happens outside of where adults supervise behavior.

#### ***Theme 4: Ongoing Adult Support is Important***

Participants expressed that cyberbullying program participation happened one

time and was often done by meeting in the gym for an assembly which often lasted 15 - 30 minutes. The assembly often consisted of someone sharing little information about cyberbullying and bullying, sharing what numbers to call, and told to go to speak with the counselor if you needed help. These programs often did not result in lasting support or guidance about how to best handle cyberbullying. Schools try to provide intervention that intervene and assist victims of cyberbullying with the opportunity to provide support and encouragement to report the incident to administrators (Reed et al., 2016). Several challenges tend to occur such as school staff commitment towards programs, student participation, and parents' inability to assist with cyberbullying (Adorjan et al., 2019).

Interviewee (I-5) shared that his school put posters up around the school about cyber safety. While this can provide information about who to go to for help it does not mean that individuals will be comfortable accessing that support; Interviewee 6 (I-6) shared, "I was uncomfortable talking about and that's not something in my household." Interviewee 8 (I-8) was the only participant who said at one point he talked with his parents about being cyberbullied and they supported him by helping him go to the principal for assistance. Interviewee 2 (I-2) shared that he was homeschooled, and his parents just told him not to get online and chat with others, and if he was harassed to quit playing. He also stated that he now has a younger brother and they have been more active with him and proactive about cyberbullying and prevention. I-3 explained that his school did not do much to help, they provided an anti-bullying program but never discussed it again. He continued to say that even though it was happening on school grounds they would not do much and there seemed to be a lack of resources. Interviewee I-6 and I- 7

shared similar experiences saying they fell victim to mental health issues developed by the harsh experience of cyberbullying.

Prevention done well in schools brings awareness to the issue of cyberbullying however it was not effective in addressing how to stop it from happening and dealing with the aftereffects of cyberbullying (Calvete et al., 2021; Tanrikulu, 2018; Olweus, 2016). Participants shared that the following would be helpful: defining cyberbullying by putting a label on the issue; improve on not standardizing everything; see that each situation is different and unique; provide more outreach resources; help kids feel safe talking with parents and others; and create a safe environment to express mental health issues and emotions.

***Theme 5: Schools are Important & Need to Improve Their Approach to Cyberbullying Prevention***

Participants expressed that it would be beneficial if administration would do weekly check-ins with students to see how they are doing, mentally and create a safe environment for students to express what is happening. Participants in my study indicated that they felt that their schools lacked a provision of appropriate assistance and reassurance to those being bullied.

Researchers are consistently exploring new avenues for prevention and intervention, increasing the approach incorporating rigorous techniques to address specific psychological processes, and identifying a way to help individuals thrive in all life settings but schools are not always up to date in their approaches to cyberbullying and other topics (Calvete et al., 2021; Espelage et al., 2017). Participants were asked

what they felt would be helpful in the future to create positive help and assistance to those experiencing cyberbullying and Interviewee (I-1) expressed that it would be beneficial if the schools and parents could “Direct kids toward a better direction, show them their value.” I-2 stated, “if we would help change and create positive change for cyberbullying- younger children should not be allowed to have user interaction.”

Interviewee (I-3) stated “to help adolescents in the future it would be beneficial to define cyberbullying by putting a label that to make it real and understandable” while Interviewee (I-4) stated that it would be “good to let those being cyberbullied or bullied know that they are not alone.” Cyberbullying prevention and intervention programs have emerged over the years to reduce harm and risky behaviors from occurring. Researchers have indicated that enhancing the effectiveness of empathy for cyber victims it could create awareness and responsibility for victims (Mascia et al., 2021). Programs such as ViSC social competence and the Tabby Improved program successfully targeted cyberbullying victimization reducing risky behaviors and provided educators with the opportunity to evaluate situations in the classroom (Calvete et al., 2021; Mascia et al., 2021). School programs can be helpful in preventing cyberbullying from occurring however, participants in this study explained that it would be helpful if more information was shared and was up to date. Unfortunately, these programs have not reached the rural communities that the participants in this study experienced.

Take for instance, Interviewee (I-6), who stated,

it would be helpful if the videos they showed were more updated. Show more recent things that are going on in the world that have to do with cyberbullying and

then just bring it to the kids from another kid's perspective.

Information shared in this study indicated that prevention material was not very helpful and was not stated clearly or effective in preventing the action of cyberbullying.

Interviewee (I-7) stated,

Clear the stigma of cyberbullying which is like the stigma that men can't talk about their feelings or like and it's not okay. Also, it would be helpful to make a change in how cyber bullying is looked at and how it's not looked at as acceptable in our culture and reach out.

Programs have been designed to focus on intervention against cyberbullying that are universal and are based on theories and are designed to be sensitive to diversity and race (Alhajji et al., 2019; Calvete et al., 2021). Intervention programs are meant to assist adolescents by intervening and assisting victims; involving teachers who are supposed to report cyberbullying incidents to administrators (Tanrikulu, 2018; Reed et al., 2016). Communication and information tools that are provided by school professionals, parents, and students can be built forming positive relationships if the information and communication is perceived appropriately. South Carolina K-12 designed an initiative that incorporated technology usage throughout the Palmetto State to decrease issues outside regular brick and mortar school problems (South Carolina K-12 Technology Initiative, 2016).

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in this study was demonstrated through the incorporation of strategies used to improve credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability detailed in Chapter 3 are described below.

### **Credibility**

The creation of unbiased, credible, and trustworthy information was received by showing that the information articulated and shared by participants showed awareness of everyone's perspective and detailed by the researcher with unbiased measures.

Credibility was achieved by demonstrating a thick, detailed, and rich account of all information provided by the participants was considered without any biases (Amankwaa, 2016; Shufutinsky, 2020; Stewart et al., 2017). Member checking was completed by asking the participants to verify the information provided and add feedback if necessary; all participants acknowledged everything was correct and accurate. Interviews were recorded; therefore, I was able to go back and highlight correct misspelled words as well as take notes. This helped me identify and establish accuracy and credibility for each transcribed interview.

### **Transferability**

The ability to provide rich, descriptive detail of the data and provide a detailed account of what was collected and analyzed helps the researcher to utilize transferability (Korstjens et al., 2018). I was able to collect and analyze descriptions from each interview and tell a complete story from specific details through my notetaking and journaling (Amankwaa, 2016). Creating codes, themes, and categories transferred to my Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and MAXQDA software.

**Dependability**

As I mentioned in chapter 3, dependability is the qualitative counterpart of reliability and consistency. Dependability for this study was met through evaluating the accuracy of the information and data received, by interpreting and drawing conclusions from the interviews received and audited (Amankwaa, 2016). An audit trail included consent forms obtained from the interviewees, IRB approval, and demographic and interview questions. I was consistent with all my interviews asking the same questions to maintain accuracy and ethnicity. Journaling which consisted of notetaking provided dependability and nonjudgmental biases.

**Confirmability**

Reflexivity, journaling, and audits are some strategies that can be used to establish confirmability (Amankwaa, 2016; Korstjen et al., 2018). Confirmability begins at the very beginning of research through audit trails which start the development and reporting of research findings (Korstjen et al., 2018). The data collected and interpreted are neutral found through investigation, my written field notes, and summaries condensed from notes creating details and a story about the lived experiences of my participants. All my data is kept in a folder on my password protected computer.

**Results**

Results from this study were created from eight participants' responses to the interview questions which were chosen to address the research question that drove the purpose of this study. The research question to be answered by this study is "What are the experiences and perceptions of White rural Males of cyberbullying



prevention/intervention programs that were involved in when adolescents?” The themes that answer the research question were: 1) Importance of Personal Experiences in Understanding of Cyberbullying; 2) There are Negative Outcomes of Cyberbullying; 3) Inadequacy of Cyberbullying Prevention/Intervention Programs; 4) Ongoing Adult Support is Important; and 5) Schools are Important & Need to Improve Their Approach to Cyberbullying Prevention.

As shown from the lived experiences from participants, cyberbullying has been known to impact the way adolescents view situations and life after they have been impacted from such events and conceptualize the harm based only on the seriousness and impact of the event impacts (Brandau et al., 2018; Brochado et al., 2021; Dennehy et al., 2020). Most negative interaction occurs outside of school hours but does not always stay at home and can continue the next day or week during school hours (Ansary, 2020). The availability and access to the Internet every day and at any time enhance the ability for negative behaviors and actions to occur (Ansary, 2020; Espelage et al., 2017; Ioannou et al., 2017; Li et al., 2016; Tanrikulu, 2018).

The question “What are the experiences and perceptions of White Males of cyberbullying prevention /intervention programs that were experienced as adolescents?” All eight interviewees expressed that prevention and intervention programs in high schools are lacking support and guidance. It was noted that white males experience cyberbullying on a variety of social media platforms which allow for anonymous harsh name calling, fat shaming, and being bullied due to friend groups. These issues have created emotional and psychological damage to their mental health. It should also be

noted that personal experiences were not understood or accounted for during high school years by school officials. Only one interviewer expressed that he had support from his parents. The other seven expressed their parent or guardian did not know about the cyberbullying. Contrary to research, this study concluded that there was inadequate support for individuals especially white males. These eight participants expressed that they did not feel safe or comfortable addressing their cyberbullying at school or at home because of the topic not being welcomed to address.

The importance of personal experiences, negative outcomes, inadequate prevention/intervention programs and support by school/parents were the themes throughout the interview process. Interviewees expressed that although cyberbullying created negative mental health issues and created the feeling of little support; individuals stayed connected to friends they felt safe communicating about the experience. These experiences addressed how schools in their rural community addressed cyberbullying. Seven of the eight interviewees expressed that the schools they attended provided a short introduction to cyberbullying that lasted about 15-20 minutes in the gym or auditorium. They were provided numbers to call if they needed or come to talk to staff if they felt threatened or harmed. Unfortunately, most of these adults expressed that the “talk” did not help or make them feel secure to talk about their experiences. In fact, Interviewee (I-1) stated:

I was bullied due to being different from others in school and was being bullied on my space which then carried on into other social platforms. I tried to go to the school to let them know it was happening and causing me problems with my

relationships, schoolwork and with not feeling safe. The school response was upsetting, told me to get of social media and ignore what was being said. I then dropped out of that school and tried going to another one. The problems just followed me.

Interviewees from these rural schools addressed the importance of additional help, support, and acknowledgement of the seriousness of cyberbullying. Their perceptions of cyberbullying prevention and intervention created the opportunity to observe and understand that cyberbullying affects individuals differently and can create the need for support, guidance, and education.

### **Summary**

The data analysis was established to answer the research question regarding the experiences and perceptions of White rural males of cyberbullying prevention/intervention programs that they were involved in when adolescents. Eight participants were interviewed, Interview 1 and Interview 8 took place by audio on the telephone and was recorded using an app called Tape A Call. The other six participants decided to participate through a zoom audio only call which was also recorded. All eight of the interviews -were transcribed using Otter ai software which provided a transcription of the calls. I downloaded and printed each interview. This provided me the opportunity to read and re-read each call, take notes, and begin my data analysis process. Each question was asked, and the participants answered with experience and knowledge of how they were affected by cyberbullying and the takeaway from prevention and intervention programs. Once the interviews were completed, I was able to analyze each

question, find codes and then themes. Chapter 5 presented the purpose and nature of the study and importance. Limitations, implications, and recommendations for positive social change.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This generic qualitative study answered the research question “What are the experiences and perceptions of White rural Males of cyberbullying prevention/intervention programs that were involved in when adolescents?” The themes that answer the research question were (a) importance of personal experiences in understanding of cyberbullying; (b) there are negative outcomes of cyberbullying; (c) inadequacy of cyberbullying prevention/intervention programs; (d) ongoing adult support is important, and (e) schools are important & need to improve their approach to cyberbullying prevention. Though the participants were negatively affected by cyberbullying in high school and participated in a prevention/intervention program, they did not feel they had adequate aid or help to deal with cyberbullying.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Although the data from each interview was similar, the participants differed in how they managed their experience of cyberbullying and how each perceived prevention/intervention programs in high school. I found the need for more detailed programs and support for individuals in high school regarding cyberbullying victimization and the growth of technology. The five themes demonstrate the importance of describing personal experiences of cyberbullying that everyone went through and how each of them perceives prevention and intervention programs/resources that they received during high school.

### **Interpretation of Finding in Relation to Theoretical Framework**

During the research process, I explored cyberbullying experiences and personal

perceptions of prevention and intervention programs through the theoretical lens of Vygotsky's social development theory. My findings confirm that the social effects of learning and communication of adolescents interfere with how adolescents interact with one another and that experiences, such as cyberbullying's effect on the perception of prevention and interventions that create the feeling of support and safety (Mulindi et al., 2019; Ungvarsky, 2020). Interaction with others begins at an early age through social development and cognitive functioning; as children grow, they develop on a social level and learn to rely on what others say and do (Mulindi, 2019). As children age, they investigate things independently and socialize with others using social media. Vygotsky's social development theory as the framework helped explain the effects of cyberbullying on the White male during adolescent years and the perception of prevention and intervention programs while in high school. Each theme explores the essential aspects of how individuals who experienced cyberbullying during high school and how they each perceived their experiences in a prevention or intervention program.

The data collected from interviews showed the relationship between social development, the human mind, and the consciousness of individuals' interactions with others in their lives (Bae, 2021; Vygotsky, 1978). Individuals rely on communication with others, whether in person or through technology; they rely on others' opinions, views, and how they perceive each other, creating a disconnect in development. For example, during my first interview, I-1 expressed that he experienced a lot of self-doubt and depression due to his cyberbullying experience:

I experienced much self-doubt, for example, body shame. Through snap chat,

people would tell me I was ugly and fat; my dad did not love me, and my parents did not want me. I was a mistake. It took a toll on me. I constantly thought about that stuff every day, which brought on my depression and bad thoughts and took a lot of my time. Took much mental capacity.

Individual cognitive and social development requires interaction with others; hence, when this concept is interrupted negatively, it can socially impact children, adolescents, and adults (Belyh, 2016).

Adolescents rely on the perceptions of others to feel good about themselves, feel essential, and maintain the status quo (Eun, 2017; Fani et al., 2011; Mulindi et al., 2019; Salleh et al., 2018; Ungvarsky, 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). The anonymity provides security and builds one's confidence. For example, I-4's social interactions and status were gained through playing video games competitively and for fun: "If you were good, you were acknowledged for it, and if you made a mistake, you were ridiculed and put down by multiple individuals." I-4 explained,

that people try and get in your head. I was in an online group with friends and others I did not know at the time on my play station. Everything there was fine until one person stated I was terrible, then it continued to go around everyone making fun, calling names, and simply insulting. It continued in other messages, and harmful pictures were mainly sent as "jokes" then, jokes often turned into straight mean toxic words: stupid, dumb, and ugly. We thought it was a joke everyone blew it off.

He went on to explain that he found he went along with it to fit in. He felt that if he said

anything, he would lose his friends, his status, and his fitting in somewhere. One statement that stands out for me during his interview was that

the more I talked to people individually, they did not like it; we all were going along with it because they thought it was just how it was how the friend group was, the cycle, but unfortunately, it got out of hand it hurt feelings and created doubt and conflict.

Learning is derived from connecting with others, including peers, teachers, or parents. It does not specify how these connections are made; therefore, social media is one essential aspect of adolescent socializing (Mulindi et al., 2019).

### **Interpretation of Findings in Relation to Literature Review**

Through this study I found that experiencing cyberbullying during adolescents' years harms the well-being of individuals and that although technology provides some positive feedback, it leads to cyberbullying that is intense and impactful. The literature I reviewed indicated that prevention and intervention programs provided in high schools could be effective (Ansary et al., 2020; Calvete et al., 2021); however, I concluded that more needs to be done at the high school level where cyberbullying is taking place and affects the well-being of individuals. In the following sections I discuss each of the five themes in more detail: (a) importance of personal experiences in understanding of cyberbullying; (b) there are negative outcomes of cyberbullying; (c) inadequacy of cyberbullying prevention/intervention programs; (d) ongoing adult support is important; and (e) schools are important & need to improve their approach to cyberbullying prevention.



### ***Importance of Personal Experiences in Understanding Cyberbullying***

Communication has become accessible to adolescents through social media platforms, cell phones, and emails, which have become targeted avenues for cyberbullying. Adolescents have access to the Internet daily, and 70% of adolescents used at least two social media platforms to communicate with others, which created the opportunity for adolescents to encounter cyberbullying (Alhajji et al., 2019). For some, technology has provided an opportunity to keep track of others and harass them day and night by posting negative comments or remarks that could follow them into adulthood and provoke mental brutality (Betts et al., 2017; Mosley et al., 2019; Sultan et al., 2021). The rapid growth of information and technology (ICT) has led to a significant concern regarding cyberbullying victimization (Denney et al., 2020). Adolescents can communicate with others in this digital world rather than face to face, which creates the opportunity for negative remarks, harmful posts, nasty words, and assault on others affecting physical, social, and psychological harm to the well-being of individuals (Dennehy et al., 2020).

Participants in this study confirmed that technology and the advantage of using cell phones and computers provided a gateway to cyberbullying and lasting effects on mental health. One participant revealed that he has suffered from mental health issues since he was due to being cyberbullied on Facebook and in space by others in his high school. Now 27 years old, he continues to work on staying positive and helping others who have experienced what he went through. Another participant, aged 19, expressed that he stopped interacting with others on his video game chat when he was 15–16

because they became too aggressive, and he completely stopped playing the games he had once enjoyed.

The findings also confirmed that teens' frequent technology usage and immediate access to social media platforms have become a significant part of everyone's social life experiences. My participants expressed that adolescents today grow up with quick and consistent access to social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and WhatsApp outlets for communication (Cataldo et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2020; Mulindi et al., 2019). COVID-19 also provided teens with a continual and needed form of communication for mental, social, and psychological needs that help them stay connected to the world around them (Brochado et al., 2021; Cataldo et al., 2021).

My participants stated they have grown up on social media, using phones and computers to stay connected with family and friends. One participant confirmed that he was provided a phone at age 11 to stay connected with his parents. Another participant explained that his younger brother plays video games and gets in chat rooms to communicate with others. This engagement in technology supports the findings of previous researchers who explained that children as young as 11 years old have the same access to technology such as cell phones, the Internet, and social media platforms such as google search sites (Bradbury et al., Midamba et al., 2019; & Mulindi et al., 2019). Video games with headsets are like older adolescents and are subject to harassment and harmful communication.

Researchers have shown conflicting information regarding White students being highly affected by cyberbullying, with other studies indicating minority youth experience

more diverse forms of bullying than White youth (Alhajji et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2020). Although many researchers indicated contradictory evidence regarding demographic differences related to cyberbullying Alhajji et al., 2019; Bradbury et al., 2018; Diaz et al., 2019; Hinduja et al., 2019), some researchers showed that being a female is a considerable predictor of cyberbullying victimization (Diaz et al., 2019; Hinduja et al., 2019; Holfeld et al., Ioannou et al., 2017; Kowalski et al., 2020; Morin et al., 2018). Additionally, researchers have eluded that male adolescents participate in cyberbullying more than females, and males were more likely to externalize issues when faced with cyberbullying (Jackson et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020). I found that White males from rural communities do experience some type of cyberbullying victimization but that they externalize issues created by cyberbullying and do not seek assistance.

### ***There are Negative Outcomes of Cyberbullying***

Cyberbullying is an ongoing issue due to the repeated and intentional cyber aggression occurring daily while using digital technology (Abbott, 2020; Alhajji et al., 2019; Bae, 2021; Young et al., 2017). Cyberbullying inflicts harm on others through harassment, intimidation, and mistreatment (Alhajji et al., 2019; Espelage et al., 2017; Ioannou et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2020). Cyberbullying also includes impersonation, written-verbal behavior, visual behavior, and exclusion (Ioannou et al., 2017). I found these same types of behaviors and outcomes in the information shared by my participants. All eight participants explained in their own words that cyberbullying is hurtful, mean, shameful words, pictures, or phrases sent out over social media to disgrace and harm someone without knowing the perpetrators. They also indicated that cyberbullying can be

a single harassing comment, photo, or video circulated worldwide through electronic avenues, creating a drastic victimization impact. I confirmed that cyberbullying is demonstrated through aggression on others privately and secretly, intentional in nature, and is hurtful as well as viewed as deliberate, malicious acts on others, creating negative feelings and actions which has also been found by other researchers (Bradbury et al., 2018; Brandau et al., 2019; Midamba et al., 2019).

These actions negatively impact adolescents' emotional and mental health (Feijoo et al., 2021). Researchers have found that cyberbullying results in adverse mental health outcomes (Skilbred-Fjeld et al., 2020). Individuals in this study expressed that they were called derogatory names, put down, harassed, and severely on Facebook, tumblr, and Snapchat. One participant shared that by the time he was in his senior year of high school, his grades had dropped, he was put on an IEP (independent education plan), dropped out of activities he enjoyed, and stopped socializing altogether. Another participant said he was shamed and made fun of due to his weight and height, that people would send him nasty Snapchat pictures that made him feel alone. My participants provided a personal view of how cyberbullying has impacted them, which is supported by previous researchers (Brandau et al., 2018; Brochado et al., 2021; Dennehy et al., 2020). Most negative interaction occurs outside school hours but does not always stay at home and can continue the next day or week during school hours which has also been demonstrated by other researchers (Ansary, 2020). The availability and access to the Internet enhances the ability for negative behaviors and actions to occur (Ansary, 2020; Espelage et al., 2017; Ioannou et al., 2017; Li et al., 2016; Tanrikulu, 2018).

### ***Inadequacy of Cyberbullying Prevention/Intervention Programs***

The process and action of prevention/ intervention experiences shared by my participants were used to explore how effective the information provided helped adolescents in high school. The emergence of prevention/intervention programs has been considered to reduce risky behavior from continuing and creating harm. Most of the programs found in the literature pointed to reducing cyberbullying targeted traditional bullying and lacked support for cyberbullying (Calvete et al., 2021). Participants in this study expressed that little information that was useful to them was shared, and the information provided was minor and did not make much of a difference. Participant I-3 shared his recollection of participating in a prevention program in school, which took place in the gym as a whole school assembly and lasted approximately 30 minutes. He recalled that someone spoke about bullying, and little was said about cyberbullying. He expressed that antibullying and cyberbullying in detail were never brought up again. He remembered being told that if cyberbullying happens off school grounds, it is out of the school's hands.

Prevention and intervention programs help protect children and adolescents from becoming victims of such aggression and provide learning opportunities to keep youth safe from harm. The incorporation of prevention and intervention programs is designed to decrease behaviors and reduce cyberbullying (Ansary et al., 2020; Calvete et al., 2021). My participant's believed prevention is tricky because adolescents are provided tools such as a phone and laptop where most cyberbullying happens.

The participants expressed that prevention could be more effective if academic

administration and counselors showed dedication to kids who have been or are being cyberbullied. Some researchers stated that enhancing the effectiveness of empathy for cyber victims can create an awareness of emotions and responsibility for victims (Mascia et al., 2021). These programs can reduce risky behaviors and provide educators with the opportunity to evaluate situations in the classroom and create conditions that avoid the consequences of cyberbullying (Mascia et al., 2021; Calvete et al., 2021). Researchers indicated that traditional antibullying intervention programs are formulated to reduce cyberbullying and can be effective primarily for children to early adolescence and did not create an effective change in adolescent years (Calvete et al., 2021). Unfortunately, these programs were not mentioned by my participants as programs they participated in.

My participants confirmed that, in South Carolina, rural areas schools do not have prevention or intervention programs in the high schools they attended. Researchers indicated that most prevention intervention programs are universal and are based on theories that include decision-making and generation change through reflective knowledge. This assumes adolescents receive information about risks, skill training, and education, their behavior can change for the better (Calvete et al., 2021). However, based on the information shared by my participants, not all prevention programs are created equally and there is a need for improvement.

### ***Ongoing Adult Support is Important***

The absence of adequate support from adults and can cause various issues for adolescents, especially related to cyberbullying (Ioannou, et al., 2017). Victims feel helpless due to the unknown perpetrators and the large audience involved in gaining

access to information or photos that have been spread rapidly throughout the digital world (Agus et al., 2021). Often parents, teachers, and other adults do not understand the tools that adolescents have access to through technology or that this type of behavior is occurring through these tools.

As indicated by participants in the study, cyberbullying left most of them with shame, guilt, depression, and social anxiety. One participant shared that he felt alone, another stopped participating in activities, and one pretended it never happened but was depressed. According to Tanrikulu (2018), adverse circumstances of cyberbullying affect individuals psychologically, physically, socially, and academically. Inadequate support creates uneasy feelings, loneliness, and a lack of trust. Researchers have indicated that cyberbullying created adverse effects such as emotional distress, sadness, anger, detachment, and delinquent behaviors (Menin et al., 2021). Adolescents experienced different thoughts and feelings that were hard to comprehend as they experienced cyberbullying personally or indirectly. Unlike traditional bullying, adolescents often faced cyberbullying victimization alone and were challenged by the ease and speed of sharing information (Menin et al., 2021; Oonagh et al., 2020; Reed et al., 2016). Because of these negative outcomes, it is important for adults to be attuned to the possibility of cyberbullying and take it seriously.

Parental mediation can be an essential aspect of helping adolescents navigate technology and negative issues. Parents can provide knowledge and prevention tips and teach children appropriate online behaviors and interventions when cyberbullying happens (Ansary, 2020). Parental interaction and mediation in the case of cyberbullying

can limit risk and harm (Change et al., 2016). Parents can help adolescents understand the importance of blocking unwanted users who post harmful and hurtful things and instruct youth about adequate and appropriate internet usage; however, adolescents are prone to be secretive of being a victim of cyberbullying (Ansary, 2020; Bradbury et al., 2018).

Seven out of my eight participants confirmed that their parents did not know they were being cyberbullied, and the only people that knew were close friends, if that. They kept it to themselves, did not share, and did not want to be ridiculed. They were told by peers and adults to handle things themselves, leaving them isolated, alone, and depressed. All the participants shared that they made it through high school but lost confidence in themselves and others because of cyberbullying. While adults in their lives did not do enough to prevent the cyberbullying or negative effects, my participants indicated that they are now aware of the issues and know to block and ignore the content. One participant expressed that he belongs to a group with others who accept him for who he is and who have also been bullied or cyberbullied in the past. They support one another and try to make a difference by getting the word out about cyberbullying and bullying in their community. Most participants said they still did not tell their parents that they were cyberbullied and wished the schools would do a better job in promoting help for these types of issues.

### ***Schools are Important & Need to Improve Their Approach to Cyberbullying***

#### ***Prevention***

Laws, policies, and regulations have the ability to provide safety and establish positive reinforcement for negative behaviors. Most educators and schools offer



protective factors for cyberbullying and individuals who perpetrate cyberbullying (Ansary, 2020). For my participants, cyberbullying was not addressed as much as traditional bullying by their schools. Students who were physically attacked in my participants' schools did receive negative consequences. Most participants shared that schools did nothing about cyberbullying because they did not see it occur. Negative interaction outside school hours does not always stay at home and can carry on the next day or week during school hours (Ansary, 2020). As confirmed by my participants, cyberbullying happened at home and school. The availability and access to the Internet daily and at any time enhance the ability for negative behaviors and actions to occur (Ansary, 2020; Espelage et al., 2017; Ioannou et al., 2017; Li et al., 2016; Tanrikulu, 2018).

Previous researchers uncovered that school-based prevention and intervention programs suggested that the nature of cyberbullying has been an ongoing issue and should continue to foster a positive school climate (Ansary, 2020; Tanrikulu, 2018). The South Carolina Safe School Climate Act explains that schools will adopt the idea that preventing harassment, intimidation, and bullying in schools will be prohibited. The school board and teachers will create a safe place for adolescents (South Carolina K-12 School Technology Initiative, 2016). According to all eight of my participants, prevention of harassment, intimidation, and bullying (physical or seen) was prohibited in their schools but not much was done or said regarding cyberbullying due to the hidden nature of the issue.

The South Carolina K-12 School Technology Initiative (2016) incorporated

technology usage throughout the Palmetto State, increasing issues outside regular brick-and-mortar school problems. Since technology is on the rise, so is the complexity of developing issues such as networking, cybersecurity, and one-on-one communication with teachers (South Carolina K-12 Technology Initiative, 2016). Teachers must be trained to identify and respond to cyberbullying (Ansary, 2020).

Creating awareness is the first step in prevention and a step in the right direction for cyberbullying intervention to begin. Providing knowledge and understanding of cyberbullying offers teachers, counselors, parents, and other administrators the opportunity to become knowledgeable and vigilant to threats in the cyber world (Alundag et al., 2020). My participants expressed the need for better communication, education, and involvement of teachers and other adults. They expressed that if resources were made available for students and educators showed commitment and acknowledged that cyberbullying exists, it would provide a healthier and safer place for students to feel comfortable reaching out for support. Although educators and schools can offer protective factors to individuals regarding bullying and cyberbullying, my participants felt the school's lacked assistance and reassurance to those being bullied (Ansary, 2020).

Furthermore, my participants also indicated that if schools enforced policies and disciplinary actions that protect cyberbullying behaviors and created adequate punishment for those who display unnecessary cyberbullying steps, then victims of cyberbullying would feel more comfortable seeking help. Creating a whole school change to create positive student interventions would allow schools to be safer and more supportive of staff and students (Acosta et al., 2019; Mascia et al., 2021; Espelage et al.,

2017). Researchers identified that creating a supportive school environment can significantly impact behavior and be effective and lasting. Such an impact can decrease adverse outcomes such as alcohol usage and violence (Acosta et al., 2019). Other researchers identified that changing awareness and attitudes regarding cyberbullying through school assemblies and software programs can increase adolescents' knowledge about cyberbullying, affecting others (Espelage et al., 2017). Data from the experiences of white males in rural communities agree that creating a safe space and conversations would encourage students to come forward.

Prevention can lead to positive student development, minimize bullying behavior, and improve social skills (Acosta et al., 2019). Researchers are consistently exploring new avenues for prevention and intervention, increasing the approach by incorporating rigorous techniques to address specific psychological processes and identifying ways to help individuals thrive in all life settings (Calvete et al., 2021; Espelage et al., 2017). As mentioned earlier, evidence-based cyberbullying prevention and intervention programs can be beneficial because they keep adolescents from engaging in cyberbullying activities and help cyber victims cope with bullying's negative impact (Tanrikulu, 2018). My participants were asked what they felt would be helpful in the future to create positive change and assistance for those experiencing cyberbullying. They explained that the programs usually lasted about 15-30 minutes in an assembly format. Seven participants explained that the assembly consisted of a counselor or mental health provider sharing information about cyberbullying and bullying. The schools often post posters with numbers for them to call. However, they indicated that what the schools provided was not

very effective.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In this study, I investigated the lived experiences of white rural males ages 18-30 who experienced cyberbullying when they were between the ages of 15-18 years of age in high school. In Chapter one, I explored potential barriers that included the inability to contact individuals in person due to COVID-19 and the difficulty recruiting participants for interviews. During this study, I could connect effectively with eight participants. Therefore COVID-19 did not create any barrier to recruitment. This study's limitations consisted of individuals not following through when they reached out to participate. Limitations mentioned in chapter one about semi-structured interviews and the ability to reach the sample size required for saturation were incorrect. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight participants, which provided information to reach saturation. I was able to meet saturation with this study.

One limitation of not conducting face-to-face interviews was the ability to execute trustworthiness. The ability to make sure each participant was expressing the truth on where they were from and if they were white males. Each participant was asked the same demographic questions to make sure they fit the criteria needed to participate in the study. As a researcher, it is essential to trust the process and make certain biases not form during the process. All eight participants answered the demographic questions and interview questions to make sure they fit the criteria for this study. By doing this, the researcher had the opportunity to make sure that each participant was treated the same, in non-judgmental and non-biases.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Further research on adolescent cyberbullying and its impact on mental health is recommended. Participants in this study shared their experiences of cyberbullying as rural white males living in South Carolina and the impact on their mental health outcomes. As a researcher, I believe we need further studies on prevention and intervention programs in South Carolina Schools from the view of parents and additional stakeholders such as school administrators, guidance counselors, and teachers. Teachers must be trained to name and respond to cyberbullying (Ansary, 2020). By doing so, it would be beneficial to create awareness for prevention and a way to begin recognizing cyberbullying intervention (Alundag et al.,2020) explained that creating awareness is the first step in prevention and a step in the right direction for cyberbullying intervention to begin.

Another recommendation would be to explore adolescent and parent relationships when mental health issues occur due to cyberbullying experiences. Participants explained that their parents had no idea that they were being cyberbullied. Therefore, future research about the importance of parent and guardian involvement would be beneficial, offering clarity and effectiveness of cyberbullying programs (Ansary, 2020; Li et al., 2016). This study supplied information regarding the ineffectiveness of school programs for the participants of this study. Future research that further understands and addresses the importance of prevention and intervention programs would help support the effectiveness and growth of individuals in high school.

The final recommendation would be to explore coping skills, strategies, and tools

that create positive influences for adolescent males dealing with cyber victimization. Past research showed that programs were created to reduce the risk of suicide, increase adult interactions, teach positive coping strategies, and accept help (Bradbury et al., 2018; Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). This study provided a view of what white males experienced with cyberbullying and the lack of support. It would be beneficial to understand the issue of support and guidance.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The potential for positive social change is to create an awareness that cyberbullying is an ongoing issue and health concern among adolescents. This research study will allow stakeholders to understand how and why cyberbullying is still a continual issue. This study has been designed to provide stakeholders: principals, teachers, counselors, and parents with the opportunity to know how and why cyberbullying is still a growing epidemic and how adolescents experience cyberbullying, as well as how to prevent and intervene when concerns are spoken about out about cyberbullying.

With our current situation and more online communication, it is vital to understand how cyberbullying happens in rural communities and how effective prevention and intervention education programs are used. This research hopes to increase the awareness of education programs and individual experiences from White males, help identify challenges endured by cyberbullying, and what individuals seek for guidance and help. With this research, the hope is to provide a firsthand account of how cyberbullying affects young White males in rural communities and effectively provide quality

prevention that needs to end the silence and detrimental outcomes of cyberbullying.

### **Conclusion**

Cyberbullying has been an ongoing issue due to repeated and intentional aggression on social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat and over text messages. The significant prevention and intervention programs for cyberbullying aim to prevent, provoke, and intervene in cyberbullying incidents and provide support and guidance (Tanrikulu, 2018). I aimed to bring rural communities to awareness about the need for prevention and intervention programs. I addressed the lived experiences of white males from rural South Carolina, which provided an understanding of how they experienced the effects of cyberbullying, prevention, and intervention resources that were helpful or not helpful. Seven out of eight participants said they did not tell their parents and relied on friends to process the bullying events. Most of them did not have a valuable experience with school prevention and recommended that future help provide additional support. My hope is that the stigma that white males are always the “perpetrator” changes with the information provided and helps stakeholders change cyberbullying policies that will change the stigma associated with bullying and cyberbullying. Continued support and guidance should focus on creating positive change and increasing kindness, compassion, and empathy. Provide an opportunity for education to explore social interactions, social media, and awareness of the damage that can be done to others. I hope that this study provides the opportunity for more research to take place. Communication guides the conversation and protects adolescents from social media harm. Everyone has a voice and a story, and we all must be part of a positive social change.

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## Appendix A: Prescreening Inclusion Questions

1. Are you between the ages of 18-30 years of age?
2. Are you a White male?
3. Are you from a rural community in South Carolina?
4. Did you experience Cyberbullying at some point between the ages of 15-18  
(includes personal experience, perpetrator, bystander/witness)?
5. What is your experience with cyberbullying prevention/intervention programs at  
some point between the ages of 15-18 years old?
6. Are you willing to share your experiences and perceptions about cyberbullying  
and the prevention/intervention programs that you participated in?



## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

I want to thank you again for participating in this study. Your time and willingness to participate are greatly appreciated. The purpose of this study is to gain further information about experiences of cyberbullying and the benefits of prevention/intervention programs as they relate to personal experiences. All information collected during this interview will be confidential and anonymous. This interview should take approximately 60 -90 minutes. This interview will be recorded to transcribe and collect necessary data. If at any time during the interview you would like to stop. Please let me know, and we will cease immediately. Again, thank you, and if you are ready, we will begin.

### *Demographic Questions*

<b>Demographic question</b>	<b>Responses</b>
What is your age in years?	Actual age
How have you experienced cyberbullying between the ages of 15-18 years of age?	Yes or no
Have you been cyberbullied?	Yes or no
Have you ever cyberbullied someone?	Yes or no
What cyberbullying program did you participate in?	Name of program and type (face-to-face course, online, etc.)
Did you only participate in the program once?	Yes or no
Did you volunteer to participate, or did you “have to” participate?	Volunteer or “had to.”
How long ago did you participate in the program?	Years and/or months

*Interview Questions:*

<b>Interview Questions</b>	<b>Interview Prompts</b>
1. What does the term cyberbully mean to you?	Tell me more about that. Tell me more about X. What do you mean by Y?
2. When you hear the word cyberbullying, what comes to mind?	Tell me more about that. Tell me more about X. What do you mean by Y?
3. What types of things did people do when cyberbullying others?	Tell me more about that. Tell me more about X. What do you mean by Y?
4. How much of an issue was cyberbullying for you?	What would you consider to be an issue? Tell me more about that. Tell me more about X. What do you mean by Y?
5. What does prevention of cyberbullying mean to you?	Tell me more about that. Tell me more about X. What do you mean by Y?
6. How well did your school prevent cyberbullying?	Tell me more about that. Tell me more about X. What do you mean by Y?
7. Looking back, how well did your parents/guardians respond to cyberbullying?	Tell me more about that. Tell me more about X. What do you mean by Y?
8. Looking back at your experience, how could cyberbullying have been prevented?	Tell me more about that. Tell me more about X. What do you mean by Y?
9. Tell me about the cyberbullying program you participated in.	Tell me more about that. Tell me more about X. What do you mean by Y?
10. Tell me what you feel the cyberbullying program you participated in did well.	Tell me more about that. Tell me more about X. What do you mean by Y?
11. Tell me what you feel the cyberbullying program you participated in did not do well.	Tell me more about that. Tell me more about X. What do you mean by Y?
12. What do you think would have been helpful for the program to talk about or include?	Tell me more about that. Tell me more about X. What do you mean by Y?