THE EFFECTS OF TEXT BULLYING ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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THE EFFECTS OF TEXT BULLYING ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

A Thesis

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Department of Nursing
Abstract

of

THE EFFECTS OF TEXT BULLYING ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

Mary McCafferty Brown

Statement of the Problem

In the last three decades, there has been well-documented research examining the prevalence of bullying in the school setting. Cyberbullying was born out of our current technological age, in a time where teens and pre-teens have access to cell phones and computers in their daily lives. Computers and cell phones were meant to be used as communication tools but have too often become the vehicle for bullying. The purpose of this study was to gather information on the effects of text message bullying on adolescents in their daily lives at school and outside of school. The information will be gathered to facilitate prevention efforts in schools intended for students, staff, and parents.

Sources of Data

A convenience sample of ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students were selected from a rural northern California high school. Two-hundred and twenty-two students completed questionnaires regarding their involvement in traditional and text bullying; exploring if they participated as the bully, the victim, or perhaps both.

Conclusions Reached

As in previous studies, results found that victims who were text-bullied reported more depressive symptoms and that there was a strong correlation between text bullying, traditional bullying, and a student's connection to school. Contrary to previous findings, text bully victims were not consistently found to have had a history of being traditional bully victims. Findings revealed the importance of implementing evidence-based bullying reduction programs in all school settings that include staff, students, and parents.

Ann D. Stoltz, R.N., Ph.D., Committee Chair

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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

Bullying has been in existence in one form or another as long as life itself and is not a new phenomenon among school children (Aluede et al., 2008). In the past, traditional bullying was generally accepted by most parents and teachers as part of the growing-up process. Most adults can recall incidents from their youth where the bully was physically bigger and more powerful than the victim and involved physical or verbal abuse, but this is not the only face of bullying. In the last three decades, there has been well-documented research examining the prevalence of bullying in the school setting and the different forms it can take (O’Moore & Hillery, 1989; Olweus, 1993).

Cyberbullying was born out of our current technological age, in a time where teens and pre-teens have access to cell phones and computers in their daily lives. Computers and cell phones were meant to be used as communication tools but have also become the vehicle for bullying. Cyberbullying, also known as electronic bullying, is a term describing the act of using technologies with the intent of causing harm to others; i.e., harassing e-mails, instant messaging, text or picture messaging via cell phones, or web pages such as Face Book or My Space (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Like traditional bullying, the intent behind cyberbullying is to cause harm to others, is a repeated behavior that can occur over time that is characterized by an imbalance of power. In cyberbullying, the target (or victim) often feels he or she cannot do anything to stop it (Espelage & Swearer, 2003).
Statement of the Problem

Nearly one-third of 6th through 10th graders in the United States report moderate or frequent involvement in bullying, whether as a bully, a victim, or both (Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfield, & Gould, 2007). Bullying is a significant problem in the school setting, according to multiple international surveys over the last three decades. Nansel et al. (2001) found that the prevalence of bullying occurrences amongst students ranges from approximately 15 to 20% in some countries but as high as 70% in other countries. Bullying is an important topic because “bullies, those bullied, and individuals reporting both bullying and being bullied all demonstrated poorer psychosocial adjustment than noninvolved youth” (p. 2097.)

The present research will focus specifically on cyberbullying using text-messages on cell phones. Text messaging is unique since it gives bullies complete anonymity providing “the perfect means of taunting their targets with little fear of being caught” (Aluede et al., 2008, p.154). The specific effects of text-bullying have not previously been examined. Given the fact that traditional bullying has been found to negatively impact psychosocial adjustment it is important to find out whether text-bullying poses a similar risk.

Working as a school nurse in the elementary and middle school settings presents daily examples of students being affected by bullying. Rubin (2003) discussed that victims have a tendency to have lower self-esteem and a high level of depression. In the study conducted by Ybarra (2004), a relationship was determined to exist between youth with more depressive symptoms and youth who have also experienced electronic bullying. In
their book, *Bullycide, Death at Playtime*, (Marr & Field, 2001), discuss situations in which victims or targets choose to kill themselves rather than face one more day of being bullied. Liang et al. (2007) stated that suicidal ideation is a phenomenon related to both depression and aggression. Shooting-related deaths, such as the tragedies at Columbine High School and more recently at Virginia Tech, have made the issue more real by bringing the disturbing realities of the effects of bullying to the forefront. The possibility of negative effects resulting from bullying make bullying prevention and intervention key issues for American schools.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to gather information on the effects of text message bullying on adolescents in their daily lives at school and outside of school. The information will be gathered to facilitate prevention efforts in schools involving students, staff and parents.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions are posed to guide this study design, results, and significance. As this is an area where little prior research has been conducted, this investigation is largely exploratory.

- What is the incidence of text bullying?
- Is there a relationship between the occurrence of text bullying and symptoms of depression as reported by high school students?

It was also of interest to investigate the following related questions to learn more about this phenomenon:
• Is there a relationship between those who are text bullying targets and traditional bullying targets?

• Is there a relationship between the gender of bullies and/or their targets specific to text bullying?

• Is there a relationship between text bullying, traditional bullying, and students’ connection to school?

The significance of this study is that the findings may have the potential to benefit students and schools in the long-term. Research that adds to the understanding of this phenomenon will allow for the development and refinement and expansion of programs that promote safe schools and include anti-bullying programs; specifically add cyberbullying prevention which would encompasses text-bullying.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms will be utilized throughout this thesis and are important in the understanding of this topic.

*Bullying*

• Bullying is deliberate, aggressive and persistent negative actions on the part of one or more persons; intended to verbally or physically hurt another person.

• Bullying represents an imbalance of power and is intended to harm

*Forms of Bullying*

• Verbal: teasing, name calling, threats, taunting, giggling, and/or laughing

• Physical: hitting, kicking, pushing, spitting, or throwing objects
• Psychological: social exclusion, spreading rumors, intimidation, and
• Manipulation, relational or social aggression
• Cyberbullying: the act of using technologies with the intent of causing harm i.e. harassing e-mails, instant messaging, text or picture messaging via cell phones, or web pages such as Face Book or My Space (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007).

**Human Components of Bullying**

• Bully: the person doing the bullying
• Target/Victim: person being bullied
• Bully/victims: students who may be both bullies and victims
• Bystanders: those observing the bullying

**Aggression** (expressed in two ways)

• Direct aggression: an overt physical or verbal act or assault, such as hitting, kicking, name-calling, etc.
• Indirect aggression: often referred to as “relational” or “social” aggression and has been found to most common in adolescent females and the most damaging to self-esteem; may be acted out in verbal threats or acts of social exclusion, ostracism, spreading malicious gossip, and/or scapegoating.

**Assumptions**

The following assumptions were employed in this study:

• The students who participated in this study have cell phones in their possession or have access to friends’ or families’ cell phones.
• The students who participated in this study were truthful in their survey responses.

• High school students would have knowledge of use and abuse of text messaging as a technique for bullying.

Methodology

The study conducted employed a convenience sample of high school students with a cross-sectional survey correlational design. The students qualified as a convenience sample because they were available to participate through their physical education classes. This type of design may demonstrate relationships between variables but does not show cause and effect. Students self-reported, using an established questionnaire as the primary research tool. Protocol was followed for gaining access to the students in the school setting by meeting with the health director of the high school district. Parent permission was obtained for this survey.

Summary

Ease of accessibility to cellular phones as a mode of communication lends itself to text messaging as a form of bullying among adolescents. Studying this phenomenon of text bullying will lead to increased information with which to develop bullying prevention programs not only in high schools but in all educational settings.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Research articles published within the last ten years examining text bullying or other forms of cyberbullying were the primary focus of this literature review. When searching databases the main words used were “bullying and text-messaging.” The majority of articles found reflected traditional bullying and were primarily quantitative studies. After expanding the use of more specific words to search the databases, more articles became available that reflected text bullying other methods of cyberbullying that were both quantitative and qualitative. Articles were found that represented varied school settings: elementary and secondary schools, as well as college; both public and private schools; rural schools and urban schools; and finally traditional schools versus alternative schools. Research investigating bullying in schools was found in cross cultural settings worldwide.

This literature review will cover an overview of bullying including the following: history of bullying; definition of bullying; types of bullying; types and characteristics of both bullies, victims (also known as targets), bully/victims and bystanders; gender differences in bullying; motivation for bullying; incidence of bullying; extent or prevalence of bullying. The focus will then change to the effects of bullying which will describe student, parent and teacher perceptions of bullying. Discussion of the following will follow: bullying trends, outcomes for both bullies and victims and finally interventions.
Overview of Bullying

History of Bullying

For many years, teachers and parents have thought of bullying in terms of a “rite of passage of growing up or boys will be boys”, which for many years meant little research was being conducted on it. However, in the late 1970s, Norwegian researcher, Dan Olweus, conducted longitudinal research on aggression and peer acceptance among adolescent boys which highlighted the importance of studying this phenomenon. He identified specific bullying behaviors that were common in bullies and their victims and published it in his work, Aggression in schools: bullies and whipping boys, (1978). While European countries continued to research bullying through the 1970s and 1980s, the U.S.A gave little attention to bullying behaviors until the shootings at Columbine occurred in 1999. The Columbine tragedy has been followed by the Santana High shooting in Santee, CA., 2001, the Red Lake High School shooting at the Ojibwe Reservation in Minnesota in 2005 and the Virginia Tech shooting in Virginia, 2007. These school shootings have all shown “effects of bullying taken to the extreme” (Butler & Platt, 2008, p.18).

Definition of Bullying

Traditional bullying has been defined by Olweus (1999) as being characterized by three criteria: “1) It is aggressive behavior or intentional harm doing (2) which is carried out repeatedly and over time (3) in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power” (p. 11). More current definitions portray bullying behaviors as a form of aggression that can be physical, such as hitting, pushing, shoving; verbal such as
name calling, provoking, making threats, gossip, making faces, stealing personal items; or social exclusion. (Feckes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005). Related to bullying using current technology: “electronic bullying has been defined as a means of bullying in which peers use electronics to taunt, insult, threaten, harass, and/or intimidate a peer” (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007, p.565).

**Types of Bullying**

Traditional bullying has been defined in the past using three forms of negative actions by students: direct verbal attacks (using mean and harmful words and names), direct physical attacks (hitting, kicking, and shoving), and more indirect methods such as intentionally isolating or excluding someone from a group (Chapell et al., 2006). Exploring the indirect form more closely, the term relational bullying, also known as relational aggression, has recently been used to describe the use of relationships to harass others that often uses gossip or intentional isolation or exclusion of someone from a social group. Research shows that boys tend to be more directly aggressive, using physical or verbal aggression while girls have a tendency to use the indirect method, relational bullying, more often (Olweus, 1993).

Cyberbullying or electronic bullying is similar to traditional bullying in many aspects but uses current technologies such as computers and cell phones that allow the bullies access to their victims. Bullies send hurtful e-mails, text messages, or picture messages that embarrass or humiliate. Cyberbullies often create false web pages such as *My Space* or *FaceBook* to harass, intimidate, or humiliate a victim. These sophisticated methods share the same intent, which is to cause harm to others. Juvonen and Gross (2008)
discussed that cyberbullying allows the bully to remain anonymous so that the victim cannot confront their bully. Cyberbullying can occur twenty four hours a day and is not limited to a single location.

Characteristics of Bullies, Victims, Bully/victims, and Bystanders

Many people think of only two groups involved in bullying: bullies and victims. In reality there are three distinct groups: bullies, victims, and bully-victims (also known as aggressive victims). In addition to the three distinct groups, it is important to add bystanders. Each group may exhibit unique behaviors with regard to relationships and social status, so it is crucial to define the behaviors and common characteristics of these distinct groups of bullies, victims, and bystanders in order to understand the relationships among them. In the literature, victims are often referred to as targets and may be used interchangeably.

Bullies

Bullies represent approximately 7% to 15% of the school-aged population. The bullies have a strong need to dominate others. They often possess social skills and understanding of others’ emotions that allow them to dominate and are seen by their peers as leaders and show social status relative to other students (Mouttapa et al., 2004). It is important to note that bullies often have trouble with academics and externalizing behaviors. Negative effects for bullies may include increased rates of truancy, dropping out of school, and difficulty maintaining psychosocial and psychosexual relationships (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008).
Victims or Targets

Victims are those students who are targets of aggressive and hurtful actions and most often cannot defend themselves against their aggressors. Current research shows bullying victimization to be “estimated to affect 15 percent to 20 percent of the U.S. student population” (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008, p.211) Victims are often characterized by their cautious, sensitive, quiet demeanor and often exhibit low self-esteem. Victims often do not want to be at school, have increased absences, and may experience somatic complaints such as headaches and stomach problems at home and at school. The victim often perceives the school environment as hostile and recent studies found that victims often suffer from low self-esteem, posttraumatic stress (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Olweus, 1993; Meyer-Adams & Comer, 2008)

Bully/Victims

Aggressive victims, also known as bully/victims, are those students who engage in aggressive behaviors but are also victims of aggression. Pellegrini (1998), stated that bully/victims constitute about the same population of students, 2-10%, and are characterized by their reactivity, inability to control or regulate emotions, academic difficulties, and peer rejection. Bully-victims may engage in reactive aggression and appear to provoke or become hostile to the other person. The aggressive victim or bully-victim, tends to be chronically bullied (Aricak et al., 2007). According to Nansel et al., “One study showed that bully-victims have significantly greater odds of weapon carrying than other bullying categories and controls” (as cited in Liang et al., 2007, p. 163).
Bystanders

One more important group that often gets ignored in the literature, are bystanders. Bystanders may develop indifference, helplessness, anxiety (Jeffery, Miller, & Linn, 2001). Bystanders may also feel uncomfortable, scared, or guilty, and may be retaliated against or join in the bullying (O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999). Barbara Coloroso (2002), in her book, *The bully, the bullied, and the bystander*, dedicates more than one chapter to understanding the bystander, this crucial member of the bullying cycle.

Dan Olweus illustrates the role of the bystander in the cycle of bullying in a well known visual tool called *The Bullying Circle*. This circle is used as a tool for teachers, students, and parents as a method for discussing ways to prevent bullying and the importance of knowing each role so that a student can actively make a positive difference. The circle displays the different possible roles filled in bullying: a) the bully or bullies; b) the followers/henchmen-or bystanders that may be take an active part in the bullying; c) supporters or passive bully/bullies that may support the bullying and not take an active part; d) passive supporters may condone or like the bullying but do not display open support; e) disengaged onlookers are the bystanders who watch what happens, don’t take a stand either way and say “it’s none of my business.” The other side of these bystanders illustrated around the circle include: a) possible defenders who dislike the bullying and think they ought to help out, but don’t; and b) the defenders of the target are those who dislike the bullying and try to help the one who is being bullied. (Coloroso, 2002, p.64). With text bullying, a bystander may show or teach the victim how to avoid the bully online or giving information on how to report the offender.
Gender Differences in Bullying

In the first large-scale study of electronic bullying among middle school students in the U.S., Kowalski and Limber (2007) concur with previous studies regarding the gender differences in bullying. Males usually are more apt to participate in direct forms of aggression, including face-to-face verbal or physical confrontations, whereas females tend to use relational aggression to indirectly bully their victims. Kowalski and Limber found the data in their study highlighted gender differences in the frequency of electronic bullying, with girls outnumbering the boys; this was consistent with prevalence rates of indirect aggression among females. Since girls tend to engage in the indirect forms of aggression, in electronic bullying it may be surmised that girls may be overrepresented among both perpetrators and victims.

Motivation for Bullying

Numerous reasons were found to motivate students to bully their victims. An earlier study conducted by Hazier et al., (1992), revealed reasons that boys and girls bully. The five items rated highest by boys were, “didn’t fit in,” “physically weak,” “short-tempered,” “who the victim’s friends were,” and “the clothes they wore.” The five items rated highest by girls were “didn’t fit in,” “facial appearance,” “cried/was emotional,” “overweight” and “good grades” (as cited in Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008, p. 4). Student focus groups from the dual studies in 2005 and 2006, conducted by Smith et al. demonstrated that many cyberbullies took part solely for the entertainment. Technology allowed them to avoid face to face contact and they rationalized bullying others as a means to have fun (Smith et al., 2008).
Extent of Bullying

Bullying among school age children occurs worldwide and in many different school settings. Schools can be small or large, urban or rural, co-educational or single-sex (i.e. in private schools), primary or secondary schools, as well as traditional or progressive or alternative schools. In a national study conducted by Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, and Scheidt (2001), that surveyed 15,686 students in grades 6th through 10th grade students, it was found that bullying occurred more frequently in 6th through 8th grade students. Overall, 10.6% of the sample reported “sometimes” bullying others, (moderate bullying), while 8.8% admitted to bullying others once a week or more (frequent bullying). Gallagher’s study (as cited in Aluede et al., 2008), stated that approximately “one out of four children is bullied and one out of five defined himself or herself as a bully” (p.155).

Text messaging using cell phones and internet communication using computers are two of the most common forms of communication for youth today (Smith et al., 2008). The current population of adolescents is the first generation to have grown up with access to both computers and cell phones. Research by NOP World Technology Kid’s Study (2005) found that 75% of 15 to 17 year olds and 40% of 12 to 15 year olds carry cell phones. Internet Safety Group (2005) found that 73% of New Zealand secondary students have cell phones and of these 23% have received text or picture messages that they consider offensive, abusive, or threatening. A study conducted by Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) reported that 45% of the girls surveyed from a Sacramento suburb have been victims of text bullying. A survey commissioned by the National Crime Prevention
Council (2006) showed that 37% of males reported being victims of cyberbullying. Internationally, cyberbullying has become a concern of children worldwide because of their increasing ability to easily access “low-cost communication devices such as Internet and cell phones” (Aricak et. al., 2008, p.253). In their 2007 study, Aricak et al. found that in Turkey, 93.5% of adolescents, aged between 15 and 22, use cell phones and that cyberbullying had become an emerging problem among youth in Turkey. In 2005, the National Center for Education Statistics found that in the United States, 91% of 58,273,000 children (18 and under) were computer users, and 59% were Internet users. In addition, 23% of preschool children under age five were reported to be Internet users. “Almost 50% of the teenage population uses cell phones; 97% use the Internet and a large proportion of these use it everyday” (Kowalski & Limber, 2007, p.S26).

When contrasting cyberbullying with traditional bullying, it is crucial to point out that cyberbullying is unique in that it most often allows the bully to remain anonymous. This form of bullying can be constant due to round the clock accessibility to technological modes of communication and provides no safe haven for the target to escape the abuse. Text messaging can be very insidious and difficult to track with the “pay-as-you-go” cell phones that can be purchased over the counter (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). Without the face-to-face contact with the individuals being targeted, the aggressors may not know the level of duress that they are causing and therefore are unlikely to experience feelings of regret, sympathy, or compassion toward their target (Strom & Strom, 2005). Conversely, the targets or victims are more likely to text back or e-mail violent or abusive replies (Raskauskas, 2005; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004).
Effects of Bullying

Students’ Perceptions

Bullying can have long-lasting devastating effects on victims. The school environment becomes a hostile environment, instilling fear and terror in those students victimized (Aluede et al., 2008, p. 156). Children who are bullied are more likely to be depressed; victims are more likely to be suicidal, with 8% for girls and 4% for boys compared to 1% overall for non-victims of bullying; bullies are more likely to carry weapons, and students targeted by bullies often have difficulty concentrating on their schoolwork which affects academic performance negatively (Aluede et al., 2008, p. 156). These statements repeated findings from earlier studies that included that the rate of absenteeism is higher among victimized students than among non-bullied peers. Wolke et al. (2001) also found that direct victims and bully/victims had significantly more illnesses, were worried about going to school, and often fabricated illnesses to stay home during school.

Teachers’ Perceptions

Teachers are often less aware than their students in terms of the extent of bullying that is occurring and this may contribute to their lack of response to bullying occurrences. (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). Bullying also has been ignored by teachers because of its “silent but adverse effect” (Aloude et al., 2008, p. 156). Teachers, like some of their students, believe that bullying takes place on the playground, in hallways, classroom and lunchrooms. Craig and Peplar found that “teachers indicated that they and other officials
intervened often and more than three times as often as did students” (as cited in Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008, p. 7). Crothers and Kolbert (2004) found in their study that “students fear that teacher intervention would potentially escalate the problem”, (p.26). Some teachers felt it important for the student to have someone to talk to about being bullied while others felt they lacked time for intervention and felt a school counselor may be more effective (Crothers & Kolbert, 2004).

Related to telling about cyberbullying incidents, Aricak et al (2008) state that 15% of the students surveyed reported telling their friends, 10% reported telling their parents but only 1% of the students surveyed reported telling their teachers. Hunter et al. (as cited in Aricak et al., 2008) found that when bullied, most 9 to 14 year old school children told their friends or families rather than their teachers. The harsh reality is that most teachers are not trained adequately to recognize bullying signs and symptoms.

Parents' Perceptions

Some parents have no clue that their student is bullying others or is being bullied by others: “They underestimate their own children’s bullying behavior and have insufficient notion of their children as victims of bullying” (Dehue et al., 2008, p. 217). Other parents are very aware and may increase their involvement to become more visible in their child’s school. Nansel et al. (2001) stated, “Conversely, parental involvement may be related to a lower level of independence among these youth, potentially making them more vulnerable to being bullied” (p.2099).

Juvonen and Gross (2008) found that “cyberbullying may appear especially frightening to parents because it involves communication technologies with which they
are unfamiliar” (p.497). Parents don’t realize that one of the main reasons their students may not be willing to tell them about traditional bullying is because of their children’s fear of the perpetrator. Additionally, Juvonen and Gross found that 50% of students surveyed did not tell their parents because they felt they needed to learn to deal with the problem themselves: about 31% were concerned their parents may find out and that they could lose cell phone and computer privileges.

*Outcomes for Bullies/Victims*

Some recent studies support the view that both bullies and their targets are at risk for psychological and physical problems that can have long lasting consequences such as; higher levels of conduct problems and dislike of school, insecurity, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, physical and mental symptoms, and even suicidal tendencies (Nansel et al., 2001, Meyer-Adams & Comer 2008). It seems that international comparisons have consistently found that perpetrators of bullying can have poorer psychosocial outcomes than non-bullies but the poorest psychosocial functioning may be evidenced by bully-victims, those who bully and are bullied by others (Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005).

An earlier study by Wolke et al. (2001), looked at common health problems and how it relates to bully involvement. Pure bullies, a term for those children who do not become victims themselves, tend to report fewer health problems than victims or bully-victims. Their findings here concurred with other studies that state that pure bullies are not necessarily worried, depressed, or anxious individuals. Instead it appears that bully-victims and victims are the individuals at highest risk for health problems as well as
behavior and psychiatric problems. Sharp (1995) found that 20% of secondary students reported that they skipped school to avoid bullying.

Cyberbullying doesn't just stop at school and can make a student especially vulnerable, even at their own home where the bullying often continues. Whether a student is being bullied at school or off school grounds by a fellow student; it interferes with learning (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). When a student is the target of bullying, absences often increase, somatic complaints such as headaches and stomach problems at home and at school persist, and the school environment can be perceived as a hostile environment. Recent studies support the view that both bullies and their targets are at risk for psychological and physical problems that can have long lasting consequences (Salmon & West, 2000).

Olweus (1992) found former bullies to have a four-fold increase in criminal behavior at the age of 24 years, with 60% of former bullies having at least one criminal conviction and 35% to 40% having three or more convictions. Conversely, those individuals who were victims were found to have higher levels of depression and poorer self-esteem at the age of 23 years, even if they weren't currently being harassed as an adult.

Students who were both bullies and victims, known as bully/victims were at risk to have worse outcomes and “poorer adjustment status” (Nansel et al., 2001, p. 2099). Poor emotional adjustment, school adjustment, and high-risk behaviors among those involved with bullying are remarkably consistent in international comparisons of bully/victims (Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005).
Bullying Trends

Willard (2007) stated that new trends are emerging that affect former statistics on ages of cyberbullying. Formerly, younger students may have been subjected to traditional bullying in the forms of verbal aggression, physical aggression, and relational aggression. Now that cell phone use among pre-teens has increased, cyberbullying occurrences reflect that increase as well.

In a qualitative study conducted in 2006, students in focus groups reported that cyberbullying, unlike traditional bullying, tends to be experienced more out of school than in school (Smith et al., 2008). These same researchers highlighted the importance of the media in being influential in increasing awareness of cyberbullying and its trends and that more research needs to be done in this area. Under-researched areas of bullying trends include as alternative methods such as “happy slapping” which refers to instant message (IM) bullying. Cyberbullying was often described by students: “they just got bored and were entertaining themselves” (Smith et al., 2008, p.380).

Interventions

Students

Smith et al. (2008) related that in their first study in 2005, student focus groups were pessimistic surrounding the dilemma of how to reduce cyberbullying. When students were asked how to stop cyberbullying, there were varied responses. One response students indicated might help curb cyberbullying is to ban mobile phones or private internet use in schools. Other students felt that even with mobile phones and internet use banned at school, bullies would still use cell phones secretively and reserve Internet use
for after school use. The students felt they would have to rid their lives of all their communication toys and that was not desirable. This study was limited because of the small sample size and lack of random selection of participants.

Smith et al. (2008), in their second study in 2006, reported that students responded differently to questions related to “best ways to stop traditional bullying and cyberbullying”. Popular responses for stopping traditional bullying ranged from students telling a parent or teacher to sticking up for yourself without fighting or even trying to find new friends. The most common responses for stopping cyberbullying were similar in that some students would tell a parent or teacher. Students who were more technologically savvy stated they would block messages or identities of the bully as well as track the offending e-mails or texts to report to parents or the proper authorities if necessary.

Juvonen and Gross (2008) conducted an online survey with 1,454 youth, ages 12 to 17 years and found that 90% of most youth reported not telling adults about cyberbullying incidents. In addition, 50% of the participants believed they “need to learn to deal with it” themselves, and finally almost one third reported that the reason they did not tell was the concern that if their parents found out their Internet access would be restricted (p. 502).

Schools/Teachers/Support Staff

Franek (as cited in Chibarro, 2007) stated “technology and its misuse by students create challenges for school counselors, teachers, administrators, and parents” (p.4). With computer technology available daily in schools, parents and teachers may be unprepared
for the daunting task of monitoring closely the use and misuse of the Internet by the students. Counselors can plan a key role in educating students as well as school staff. Limber (as cited in Chibarro, 2007), suggests that “bullying prevention and intervention best practices include training school personnel about the nature of bullying and its effects, how to respond if bullying is detected, and methods of reporting bullying incidents” (p.4). Teachers and other professionals are in an ideal position to help identify problem behaviors since students spend the majority of their day with them (Bardick & Bernes, 2008). In addition students need to be included in learning how to identify and intervene in bullying to help decrease the occurrence of bullying.

Program Models

Different program models are being adapted worldwide to reduce bullying. The “telling strategy” appears quite well imbedded in United Kingdom (UK) schools. In addition to teaching students, the next logical step would be to increase awareness among adults, both in the school setting and home setting (Smith et al., 2008).

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, developed in Bergen, Norway, is considered a highly successful intervention program that has proven to significantly reduce bullying in the schools that have adopted it” (Coloroso, 2005, p.176). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), has a website that links parents and students to information regarding the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. Olweus’ program has contributed to significant reductions of antisocial behavior, improvements in class order and discipline, and more positive attitude towards schoolwork and school, (SAMHSA, 2003).
The Olweus program is built on the premise that children have the right to feel safe in school. His program is built on four key principles: 1) warmth, positive interest, and involvement from adults; 2) firm limits as to unacceptable behavior; 3) in case of violations of limits and rules, consistent application of non-hostile, non-physical sanctions (discipline as opposed to punishment); and 4) behavior by adults at home and at school that creates an authoritative (not authoritarian) adult-child interaction or child-rearing model (Coloroso, 2002 p.176). Incorporating these four major principles into a well-written anti-bullying policy, along with implementation of a school wide program, can assist in defining behaviors and actions to reduce bullying and foster a positive school climate or culture.

Another project, based on the Olweus model is Steps to Respect, developed by the Committee for Children. This program focuses on decreasing bullying but also focuses on building supportive relationships. In addition, this program teaches elementary students how to recognize bullying as well as steps to follow to stop or curtail it: emphasizing the importance of reporting bullying (Coloroso, 2002, p.178).

Initially, anti-bullying presentations were failing across the country. “Teachers, parents, and students across the United States reported observing in increase in bullying after school wide presentations that focused primarily on the negative effects of bullying.” (Davis, 2007, p, 27). It was during the mid 1990s that the programs began to shift their focus toward school wide, staff-based interventions which would change the climate and culture of a school.
Stan Davis, an educator for more than thirty five years, travels to schools and trains teachers, administrators, and staff. It is believed that bullying reduction can occur by 50% if schools implement an evidence-based program. The Davis program complements programs already established; but the premise is to teach respect and tolerance. The skills learned in this model include a more hands-on approach. Stan Davis’s book, *Empowering Bystanders*, (2007), lays the foundation for making schools safe places for all students.

To meet this goal, each school develops clear, enforced school-wide standards of acceptable and unacceptable behavior with predictable and consistent consequences. Positive modeling by staff and strong staff-student relationships are a focus to encourage appropriate behavior and make it easier to report bullying. Schools should include helping aggressive youth to change their behavior as well as find alternate ways to meet their needs. Instead of advice for targets, the program recognizes clear support for targets of bullying that focus on protection and healing and help targets connect with school. Finally, the program fosters empowering bystanders to be active in reducing bullying by helping them develop skills as well as empathy. These are deliberate interventions, implemented to foster a positive school climate and culture (Davis, 2007).

Websites are another type of intervention. There are numerous, reputable websites for easy access. One in particular, Stop Bullying Now, is very well known and has multiple resources available for students, their families and the school system.

Bullying intervention programs for schools need to include staff, students and parents. In 2004, Crothers and Kolbert’s findings “support the validity of providing students with the terminology to discuss the issue of bullying, a main objective of most
bullying prevention programs” (p.27). Davis, (2007) helped develop a clear set of standards in his school “as to what types of language are and are not acceptable and allowed” and found that by changing the school climate, having a shared language and making specific behaviors the social norm, bullying in schools can be reduced, (p. 88).

Strom and Strom (2005) report schools will face challenges when confronting cyberbullying; some of these challenges include “identification of cyberbullies, encouragement for victims to report abuse, access to counseling for those who suffer persecution curriculum to guide civil behavior online, rehabilitation programs to help dysfunctional youngsters, parent education to improve their monitoring and guidance functions, and the linkage of institutions for cooperation across jurisdictions”, (p.31).

Li’s qualitative study, (2007), explored bullying, cyberbullying, and victimization as an integrated whole. “The close tie amongst bullies, cyber-bullies, and their victims found in this study underscores the importance of holistic approaches for the research and possible intervention programs related to cyberbully issues” (p.1788).

Summary

“Until the 1980s, bullying was often seen as a normal and acceptable part of childhood” (Davis 2007, p.26). According to the Stop Bullying Now website (2009), “As a culture, we are focusing new attention on childhood bullying and harassment. As we watch children being crushed by bullying, we often feel powerless. No more! There are ways to stop bullying, based on decades of research”. Bullying is real and it does affect children in their early psychosocial development which can affect them as they grow into adolescence and adulthood. In reviewing the literature it is clear there is well-documented
research about bullying over the last three decades. With the advent of technology and
everyday cell phone use, bullying has become more sophisticated. Up until
approximately the last five years, the research has been scant regarding cyberbullying. By
documenting the incidence and effects of cyberbullying in local schools, it is hoped that
interventions and programs can be adapted to combat this insidious problem. In addition,
further research to assess interventions that reduce bullying of all kinds is equally crucial
and must be continued.
Chapter 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter will articulate the relevance of social learning theory to text bullying. An overview of the theory and application to this research will be explored. The premise of social learning theory is stated by Bandura (1977):

“Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action” (p. 22).

Overview of Social Learning Theory

Bandura’s social learning theory (SLT) now known as the social cognitive theory (SCT), focuses on the concept of self-efficacy. The basic concepts of traditional learning theory are imbedded in Bandura’s social learning theory. His addition of the social element argued the importance of the essential elements of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. The crux of this theory is about changing one’s perception of what is thought to be an acceptable behavior. If a person observes a positive, desired outcome in the behavior being observed, he or she is more likely to imitate or model that behavior, and finally repeat and continue that behavior. The theory of social learning theory developed (known as social cognitive theory) to include a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and
environmental influences that occur in people's lives that can be used to explain human behavior.

Bandura developed social learning theory after being influenced by the earlier work of Miller and Dollard (1941), a reinforcement-oriented theory which focuses on a behavior needing to be reinforced in order to be learned. The SLT focuses on three main principles: 1) The highest level of observational learning is achieved by first organizing and rehearsing the modeled behavior symbolically and then enacting it overtly. 2) Individuals are more likely to adopt a modeled behavior if it results in outcomes they value. 3) Individuals are more likely to adopt a modeled behavior if the model is similar to the observer and has admired status and the behavior has functional value (http://tip.psychology.org/bandura.html).

Bandura (1977) identified four components to observational learning: a person must 1) pay attention to the significant features of the modeled behavior; 2) remember or retain the modeled behavior observed; 3) act out the behavior; and 4) have motivation for adopting that behavior.

Bandura (1977) discussed intrinsic reinforcement as a form of internal reward such as a sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, or sense of pride. Bandura stated that external or environmental reinforcement was not the sole factor influencing learning and behavior. Internal rewards such as satisfaction, sense of accomplishment, and sense of pride were all forms of intrinsic reinforcement.
Application of Social Learning Theory to the Research Problem

The social learning theory suggests that adolescents model peer behaviors. Bandura (1973) discussed how the SLT has been applied to the understanding of aggression; “Since aggression does not originate internally and its social determinants are alterable, social learning theory holds a more optimistic view of man’s capacity to reduce the level of human destructiveness” (p.59). Mouttapa et al. (2004) found that adolescents model friends’ behaviors, including aggressive behaviors. Their study contrasted social dominance theory and social cognitive theory and suggests that “Social cognitive theory, rather than social dominance theory, best explains the friendship patterns associated with bullying, victimization, and aggressive victimization among adolescents” (p.326). These findings suggested that the presence of aggressive friends is associated with participation in aggression, whereas the presence of nonaggressive friends is associated with less participation in aggression. Arsenio and Lemerise (2001) state (as cited in Pepler et al., 2008), that when children initiate bullying, “...they seem to abandon a sense of right and wrong and infringe on the safety and well being of others” (p.327). Bandura identified a similar construct called, “moral disengagement, in which there is a lack of self-regulation regarding moral conduct” (as cited in Pepler et al., 2008, p.327).

Related specifically to cyberbullying, students may model their peers’ behaviors that are observed. An example might be joining in when text messaging hurtful messages or pictures are sent to another person; collaborating with others when posting threatening messages or revealing pictures on Internet sites such as My Space or Facebook; and creating false websites to malign or misrepresent a person. Aricak et al. (2008) stated,
“The Internet, like television, affords much opportunity to vicariously observe inappropriate behaviors modeled by others” (p.255).

Summary

This research seeks to quantify the prevalence of text bullying in a high school and the relationship to traditional bullying, depression, and connection to school. The application of SLT is important in that it provides a framework with which to apply the results to interventions. By focusing on peer relationships, it is hoped that study outcomes will have broad application to school nursing practice.
Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The methodology for the study was designed to examine the prevalence of text bullying and the relationship to depression and connection to school on students in the high school setting. Based on prior research on bullying it is expected that victims of text-bullying will report more depressive symptoms and less connection to school than non-victims. It is hoped that students who feel connected to school will have less depressive symptoms because this would suggest prevention and intervention strategies. Research design, data collection and sampling techniques are presented in this chapter.

Research Design

A quantitative research study using a non-experimental, cross-sectional, correlational design was conducted. A single administration questionnaire was completed by students across high school grades to determine the relationship between text bullying, depressive symptoms, and connection to school. A cross-sectional design allows the investigation of this phenomenon with students across all grades in the high school, in different developmental stages. This study is also one of the first to examine text bullying so the findings will also be descriptive as the demographic characteristics of victims of text bullying are examined.

Sample

A convenience sample of 222 students was selected and limited to students enrolled in physical education classes at a rural northern California high school who had parental
permission. Of the 222 students in the convenience sample, 110 students were male and 112 students were female. Although students were represented in all grades, (freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors), the majority of the sample represented freshman and sophomores since the California educational requirement for high school graduation requires two years of physical education and many students don't continue taking physical education in the upper grades. The majority of students were in the 10th grade (See Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Student Grade Placement in Text Bullying Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographics

The age of students surveyed, ranged from 13-18 years, with the mean age being 15.22 years of age. The Standard deviation was .944. This indicates that the sample represents primarily students 14-16 years of age, which has previously been identified as the most common ages for cyberbullying (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007).
Variables

There are no true independent variables in this study since this is a non-experimental correlational design, but the categories of victimization and the two forms of bullying (traditional and text bullying) could be considered the independent variables. Dependent variables are school connectedness and depression. The outcome of depression and school connectedness would be dependent on victimization related to traditional and text bullying.

Human Subjects Assurance

In order to insure the protection of human subjects, the method of data collection and the proposed sample selection process was submitted to the Student Research Committee of the Division of Nursing at California State University, Sacramento. It was determined by the committee that the study posed minimal risk to human subjects. Participation in the research study was entirely voluntary and any information collected had no names or identifying marks, assuring anonymity. The hard copy files will be collected and stored in a locked cabinet. The electronic files will be collected and stored on the faculty advisor’s university computer which is password protected. All raw data will be destroyed after seven years.

Data Collection Instrument

A survey about school bullying was the instrument used to collect data for this research. Permission was obtained directly from the survey authors, Ann Stoltz, Ph.D., Chair and Associate Professor of the CSUS Division of Nursing, and Juliana Raskauskas, Ph.D., Assistant Professor at CSUS. This same instrument is part of a larger ongoing
research project, so it was important to utilize the same instrument for consistency in reporting results. Four major scales were created from previous studies and with the results of the internal consistency Alpha test show reliability of the scales constructed.

*Traditional bullying scale*

The questionnaire about School Bullying includes 3 items asking about demographics; a large portion of the questionnaire asked specific questions about victimization and bullying behavior, using a checklist of various bullying behaviors (i.e. hitting, mean teasing, purposely left out, threatened, etc.). using a point scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 6 (more than once a week) to determine the frequency of the behaviors for the year. The scale was the sum of items on physical bullying, teasing, exclusion, and gossip. For the whole scale the mean was 1.71 (SD = .96), and the internal consistency alpha score was .72.

*Text bullying scale*

The text-bullying survey was designed (based on existing bullying surveys), starting with a filtering item which asked whether the students had ever received harassing, threatening, or offensive text-messages; if they answered yes, then they were directed to additional items regarding how often in the past year this had occurred, where these occurred, whether they had reported, what the content of the messages had been, and the age and gender of the text-bully (if known); the last section of the survey asked about students’ feelings about their teachers and their school.
Depression scale

A depression scale using CES-D (a standardized measure developed by the Center for Epidemiologic Studies) was used to assess depressive symptoms— it is a self-report measure. People rate how often they have experienced a series of symptoms with the past week and a 4-point scale from 0 (rarely or none of the time-less than 1 day this week) to 3(most or all of the days this week.) Sample items are: “I felt depressed”, or “I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing”, or “I did not feel like eating, my appetite was poor. For the whole scale the mean was 9.59 (SD = 6.48), and the internal consistency alpha score was .78.

Connection to school scale

The final construct used eight items that dealt with connection to school. The use of a composite scale from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (ADD Health) was utilized for this section. This portion of the survey measured the degree to which the students felt connected to their teachers, peers, and school. The higher score on the measure indicated a more powerful bond to school. For the whole scale the mean was 19.69 (SD = 6.41). The alpha internal reliability coefficient for the connection to school scale for this study population was .80.

Data Collection Procedure

Permission for distribution of the questionnaires was secured from the Health Director of the Northern California school district, along with permission from the Principal and Superintendent of the high school. Physical education teachers were contacted by the investigator prior to distribution of the questionnaires to insure the
conduction of the survey would flow smoothly. Students were asked to fill out the questionnaire at the beginning of the class period after the investigator was briefly introduced. Students were instructed to fill out the survey upon receiving it. The students were seated in the gymnasium and did not leave the vicinity while answering the questions. The students worked independently and did not share information. They were instructed to skip questions they felt uncomfortable with direct any questions they had to the investigator who was present during each class period. When the students finished filling out the questionnaires, they returned them to a manila folder designated for that class period. No names or other identifying marks were made on the surveys to insure anonymity.
Chapter 5

RESULTS

This study collected data from high school students attending a rural high school in Northern California. Students were asked to complete a self-report survey examining text bullying and its relationship to factors such as depressive symptoms and connection to school.

Research Questions

First, the present study examined the incidence of text bullying. Students were asked if they had received harassing, threatening or offensive text messages in the current term. This was a dichotomous variable with students choosing either “yes” or “no.” Of the 222 students surveyed, 21.2% answered “yes”, that they had received harassing, threatening or offensive text messages, while 69.8% answered “no”. A further 9.0% did not answer this item. Forty students reported on how often they were text bullied in the previous year. The responses ranged from 1 (once or twice) to 7 (20 or more times). Please note that these are number of incidents and not number of text messages. This was found to be a more reliable measure because many students could not remember the number of text messages sent in an incident. Most students reported their experience of bullying in the second category ($M = 2.30, SD = 1.98$), indicating “between three and five times”.

Related to the research question, it was of interest to see the distribution of gender of bullies and the gender of targets of text bullying. While the cell size was not large enough to run statistics, both males and females were more likely to be bullied by male students. Gender break-down of victims and text bullies can be seen in Table 2.
Table 2

Gender Distribution of Text Victims and Their Bullies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullies</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both genders</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, to examine the differences on depression between text victims and non-victims, an Independent Samples t-test was conducted. The t-test revealed that victims ($M = 12.06, SD = 6.38$) and non-victims ($M = 9.41, SD = 6.43$) differed significantly on the CES-D depression measure, $t(195) = -2.44, p < .05$, such that text victims reported more depressive symptoms.

Further, a correlation was used to determine if there is a linear relationship between text bullying and depressive symptoms, but this relationship failed to reach significance ($r = .26, p = .07$) most likely due to the small number of students who were text bullied.

Third, a Chi-Square Test was used to determine if there is overlap between students who are text bullying targets and traditional bullying targets. Findings indicated that the overlap between cybervictims and traditional victims was significant ($\chi^2(1, N=175) = 6.36, p < .05$). However, the overlap was showing that students who were not traditional victims were also not cybervictims. This is consistent with the fact that most students are
uninvolved in bullying. Finally, it was also of interest to see whether there was a relationship between text bullying, traditional bullying, and students' connection to school. The findings determined that there was a significant relationship between text bully victims, traditional bullies, and traditional bully victims, showing the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, \( p < .05 \). Students' Connection to School was not significantly correlated to any of the other variables \( (p > .05) \). Correlations can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlations Between Text Bullying, Traditional Bullying and Students' Connection to School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Text Bully Victim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. School Connectedness</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Traditional Bullying Victim</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>-.42**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Traditional Bully</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>-.41**</td>
<td>-.60**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

There was a significant relationship between the amount of traditional bullying and text bullying. There was a moderate positive correlation such that those who scored high on text bullying frequency also tended to score high on traditional bullying frequency. In addition, the findings determined that there was a significant relationship between text bully victims, traditional bullies, and traditional bully victims.
Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of the Study

Problem

Decades of research have presented the problem of bullying in schools. Dan Olweus pioneered much of the research surrounding this topic and since has been joined by many other researchers. The definition by Olweus (1993) is the most commonly used and includes three main elements: repeated exposure to negative action; intention to harm; and imbalance in power. The definition has grown and evolved over the years, some researchers emphasizing that all three criteria must be present to be considered for bullying, while others added categories of individuals as bully, victim, bully-victim, or bystander (Langdon & Preble, 2008). Solberg and Olweus, (2003) suggest that different methods of gathering data may have influenced reported rates of bullying (as cited in Langdon & Preble, 2008). Data are often gathered by students self-reporting the occurrence of bullying but is also obtained by teacher and peer observation or reporting. Discussion of bullying and more currently cyberbullying is often in the daily news with reports of violence by students upon other students. Despite how bullying is depicted by individuals who are involved or how it is reported, bullying is associated with affecting the mental and physical health of students. Bullying has been linked to depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. Raskauskas & Stoltz (2007) suggested that electronic bullying may pose a new threat to healthy social and emotional development among adolescents. It is paramount for school staff, students and families to become aware in
order to learn how to effectively intervene and reduce the occurrences of bullying, whether it is traditional bullying or cyberbullying.

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura’s social learning theory was the theoretical framework utilized for this research study. Bandura’s theory incorporates both aspects of behavioral and cognitive learning, suggesting that the environment causes people to behave in certain ways, while cognitive learning assumes that behavior is influenced by psychological factors. In reporting bullying behavior, students clearly stated that bullying occurred within the school setting but often away from school grounds, as in the case of cyberbullying. It is suspected that students may have modeled behavior presented by their peers by actively joining in the bullying behaviors or by passive behavior such as not intervening to stop the bullying behaviors.

Juvonen and Gross (2008) found that perceptions of certain behaviors were deemed routine or elicited responses from students such as “I need to learn how to handle this on my own”. When cyberbullying occurs through text messaging or computer use, it was often not mentioned by the students to parents or guardians for fear of having their phone and computer privileges taken away (p. 504).

What is evident from this theory is that modeling behaviors of others will be the key to changing the bullying climate from one of tolerance or indifference to non-acceptance of bullying behaviors as the norm. School staff and students need to be provided with the tools to recognize signs and symptoms of bullying in order to stop it from happening. Likewise, parents should be included in the bullying reduction programs as well.
Behaviors and expectations should be clearly defined in a school wide program that involves staff, students, and parents in order to feel that each group has positive input. With *buy-in* from these individuals, it will be more likely that the school climate and culture can be changed to reflect the behaviors that are expected and accepted.

**Methodology**

A quantitative research study using a non-experimental descriptive design was conducted. Questionnaires from a 32 question survey were distributed to physical education students at the beginning of each class period. A total of 236 surveys were distributed. Questionnaires were completed and handed into the researcher by placing the surveys in an envelope before each class was dismissed which allowed collecting data in a one-day time period. A return rate of 100% from the students who participated was reached. Of the total 236 surveys that were distributed and of the total surveys collected, 222 were used in the research or 94%. Fourteen questionnaires, (6%) were filled out inappropriately. i.e. scribbled upon or in a nonsensical manner, and were not used in the final results.

*Discussion of Findings*

This study collected data from high school students attending a rural high school in northern California. Students were asked to complete a self-report survey examining text bullying and its relationship to factors such as depressive symptoms and connection to school.

Related to the frequency of text bullying and the frequency of traditional bully victimization, I expected to find that text bullying had higher rates since it can occur
outside of school as well as in the school setting. However, the percentage of text bullied students was lower than anticipated with 21.2 % of the students reporting that they had received harassing text messages. A previous study, conducted by Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) reported that 45% of the girls surveyed from a Sacramento suburb have been victims of text bullying. The National Crime Prevention Council (2008) reports that almost 33% of males and more than 36% of the females surveyed reported having been a victim of cyberbullying. If the current study had been conducted in a more affluent and urban school setting, the percentage would probably have been much higher. Another reason the percentage is not higher may be related to underreporting by students or the fact that cell phone use is most often prohibited on campus until school is dismissed. This finding is important because underreporting does not reflect the true numbers of cyberbullying occurrences. Conducting further research related to cyberbullying in rural school settings would be warranted.

Related to depressive symptoms and a students’ connection to school, it was anticipated that victims of text-bullying would report more depressive symptoms and less connection to school than non-victims. Findings concurred with previous studies that there is a link between depressive symptomatology and cyberbullying (Ybarra, 2004).

Contrary to previous findings, more of the text bullied victims were not bullied traditionally than were bullied traditionally. However, the amount of traditional bullying was significantly correlated with the amount of textbullying.

The study findings determined that there was a relationship between text bullying and traditional bullying, and these two bullying methods affect a students’ connection to
school, as well as reporting depressive symptoms. Working as school nurse this study has provided information that allows me to ask more specific questions of students who wander into my office or whose name is discussed at a student study team meeting. Identification of bullying behaviors can be difficult to tease out of a seemingly routine visit to the nurse’s office. School nurses can be effective in using their diagnostic and communication skills to sift through symptoms such as persistent stomachaches or headaches.

Internationally, cyberbullying is a global phenomenon that requires further research. It also warrants research in the prevention of bullying from occurring. Early intervention coupled with evidence-based bullying reduction programs implemented on school sites will begin to change the culture and climate surrounding the phenomenon of bullying.

Limitations of Study

The sample size (N = 222) was narrowed by the fact that it included only students who were currently in physical education classes during the time of the survey. Students may have felt rushed since they only had class time to fill out the survey and still were expected to participate in physical education for the remainder of the class period. Perhaps a health education class, where the entire period was dedicated to filling out the questionnaire may have produced different results. Students self-reported and may tend to under-report when asked to fill out a survey in the presence of others, even though it was anonymous. Juvonen and Gross (2008) stated, “Self-reports are limited when no other data sources can be utilized” (p.503). This finding is supported by other research studies
and conversely finds that online surveys often yield different results than face-to-face surveys.

These results may not be generalized to all high school students as it was conducted at one rural high school and utilized a convenience sample rather than random assignment. This study focused on students in the high school setting, ranging primarily in age from 14-17. These inferences cannot be made about bullying experience of youth younger than 14 years.

Finally, the survey was conducted in a comprehensive, conventional high school and would not have included more high risk students to participate that may have attended other alternative high school programs. Additional data is needed related to cyberbullying across a wider demographic spectrum of youth, especially those youth who may be less connected to mainstream high schools, those youth younger than 14 years of age, and those youth who may not have immediate access to electronic technology.

**Implications for Theory Development**

Social learning theory attempts to explain some of the reasons that children may bully and grow up to continue to bully. The theory supports that behavior is often a product of a person’s environment and the psychological make-up of that individual. Behavior modification is central to many forms of psychotherapy and family therapy and modeling is an important facet of all of these. Families may benefit more with treatment that incorporates social learning theory to make things clearer related to changing behaviors in a positive manner. In the school setting, school nurses and educators can work closely
to make a difference in understanding students behavior related to helping reduce bullying behavior by setting up interventions and strategies that have been successful.

**Implications for Research**

Research has focused on the frequency of bullying, where bullying is occurring, and the specific bullying trends changing with cybertechnology. The research focus has involved primarily students but there is need for more research on others perceptions such as the teachers, other school staff, and parents. There have been more longitudinal quantitative studies but qualitative research is limited and it is important to find common themes, involving greater numbers of students.

Research should continue to explore ages where cyberbullying often starts. The age of when cyberbullying is initiated has been going down steadily for the last several years. Initiation of bullying behavior using these technologies is dependent on when young people gain access to these technologies. Any research related to age is outdated, based on the rapid adoption of the use of these technologies by younger and younger people” (Willard, 2007, p.13).

Juvonen and Gross (2008), raise the issue that parents and other adults may both overestimate the risk of bullying online and downplay the risk of bullying in school. “Parents as well as school personnel may fail to see the connection between bullying in school and in cyberspace” (p.504).

The topic of school bullying has been brought to the attention of the public with the dramatic increase of incidences of school shootings. The online cyberbullying occurrence where a young teenage girl in Missouri commits suicide subsequent to cyberbullying is.
also cause for great concern. “Although interest in the topic has increased, the field is still lacking in research, especially research related to family-based treatment” (Butler & Platt, 2008, p.18). Specific family characteristics related to bullying need to be addressed; for example, bullies often have authoritarian fathers and lenient mothers; and parents of bullies tend to be punitive, harsh, and overly strict towards their children, being high in their demands and being low in their responsiveness. Many times, bullying situations at school are handled according to that school’s anti-bullying protocol. Interventions must include the family in order to confront the bullying in order to have a more holistic approach to resolving the issue.

**Implications for Practice**

The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) states that “…school nurses must be able to readily identify those who bully and those who are at-risk for, or have experienced bullying” (2005). The opportunity to make an impact on the bullying problem is at the fingertips of many school staff who work with students on a daily basis. School nurses often are responsible for more than one school in a district but with good communication with other school staff, they can make a difference when assessing students at risk.

Bullying is one of those occurrences that can be subtle and nebulous and may take several skilled *looks* to make a connection. Frequent absences, frequent nurse office visits, academic decline, depressive tendencies, teacher e-mailing concerns about a student; these variables that often appear fragmented can be pieced together to form the pieces of an intricate puzzle. It’s crucial for the school nurse to stay connected to the
persons that interact more regularly with students such as teachers, secretaries, counselors, campus monitors, and other students. It is equally important to stay connected with the family of the student, whether the student is the bully or the victim. Awareness in the family makes the problem more real for the student and may facilitate faster treatment and resolve, instead of having the bullying problem go unnoticed for an insufferable amount of time.

The school nurse can be instrumental in identifying students that are victims or at risk for bullying and facilitating contacts with parents and school staff, or parents and outside counseling services. The school nurse’s job is to help maintain the students’ health and safety and being involved in bullying prevention is paramount in maintaining emotional as well as physical health.

Summary

Students reported the frequency of being bullied as several times a month which does concur with the national research studies. Nansel et al. (2001) found that in the United States, researchers from the U.S. Health and Human Development (NICHD) surveyed 15,686 public, parochial, and private school students, grades 6 through 10 to assess their experience with bullying. Approximately 1.7 million students reported being bullied from once a week to several times a week, which represents about 8.8% of the student population, indicating an enormous problem.

Cyberbullying is a method being used to extend the bullying environment for many students. Bullying can occur at school but often continues to occur once students leave
the school premises. Research documents that “cyberspace operates as a risky environment separate from the confines of the school” (Juvonen & Gross 2008, pg. 498).

It is crucial for schools and families to work closely in combating the bullying problem. Awareness and knowledge are the first step; sharing the same language in discussing bullying is the second step, and implementing an anti-bullying program that involves input from students, family, and staff constitute the final and most important step.

In developing policy and curriculum to reduce bullying, it is crucial that the school provides for students and adults a mechanism for reporting, and intervening and dealing with the physical and psychological violence that surrounds any type of bullying. These policies and curricula need to be developed in the elementary grades so positive behaviors and a caring school climate and culture are well-established long before students reach high school age. Schools must become safe and caring places where children and adults treat one another with kindness and respect. Coloroso (2005) described in her book that schools need a strong anti-bullying policy that is “clearly articulated, consistently enforced, and broadly communicated” (p.178); staff and students need to model what changes in behavior are expected; finally the motto of the school can be, “This is the way we do things here”, (Coloroso, 2005, p. 186).
Consent to Participate

Text Bullying in High Schools Student Survey: A Comparison Study

Your student is being asked to participate in a survey that is being conducted by Mary M. Brown RN, PHN, a student in the graduate program at California State University Sacramento. This research data will be utilized in a larger study to determine the prevalence of text bullying in 10 high schools in Northern California and the effects on students.

Your high school student will be asked to complete a 33-item survey which will take approximately 20 minutes during his or her P.E. class. Each student will be provided with an informational brochure on Bullying that is informative for both parents and students.

Benefits
Students may benefit from receiving information on text-bullying. The findings from this research have the potential to benefit students and schools in the long-term. Research that adds to our understanding of this phenomenon will allow current anti-bullying programs to be expanded to include text-bullying prevention.

Confidentiality
There will be no names on the surveys and once collected will be sealed in an envelope and collected from the teacher by the school nursing researcher. The results of the survey will not be reported individually. The school results will be compared with the results from 9 additional high schools. The survey data will be stored in locked file cabinets and destroyed after 5 years. The data from each school will be entered into an Excel spreadsheet and will be given to the primary researchers and kept on a password protected computer.

Risks
Some students may feel uncomfortable completing bullying items and or the items relating to how they are feeling. Students are advised to skip items they do not wish to complete and may stop participating at any time. Reporting on bullying may bring up negative emotions for some students. The school nurse researcher will be available on campus the day the surveys are administered. Students feeling the need to speak to a school counselor will be referred by the teacher or school nurse researcher.

Contact Information
If you have any questions, please contact Mary M. Brown at (530) 622-6464 ext. 2226, mbrown@mlusd.net or Debbi Herr, Director of Coordinated School Health and Safety for the school district at (530) 333-8300. Your student’s participation in this research is voluntary.

Please check the box below, sign and return only if you do not want your student to participate.

☐ I DO NOT want my child to participate in the survey.

______________________  _____________________
Signature of Parent or Guardian  Date

______________________
Student Name
BULLYING SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to ask your opinions about different kinds of bullying. This survey is anonymous—your identity will not be connected to your responses. You may skip any questions or stop taking the survey at any time.

I. TEXT-BULLYING

1. Do you have a cell phone?
   A. With text-message capability
   B. With picture taking capability
   C. With internet capability

2. Have you ever received harassing, threatening, or offensive text-messages?
   - Yes
   - No

3. Have you ever sent harassing, threatening, or offensive text-messages?
   - Yes
   - No

4. In which of the following ways have you used your cell-phone or had cell-phones used? (Mark all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Happened to me</th>
<th>I did to someone else</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Left nasty voice-mail messages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Used text-messages in a fight or argument</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Used text-messages to spread rumours.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Used text-messages to end a relationship.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Received/sent offensive, pornographic, abusive pictures.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. In the past year have you received harassing, threatening, or offensive text-messages? (Mark One)

   - None
   - Once or Twice
   - 3-4 Times
   - 5-6 Times
   - 7-10 Times
   - 10-15 Times
   - 16-20 Times
   - 20 or More Times

   If you have never been harassed or bullied by text-messages, Skip to Question #18

6. Where have you received harassing text-messages? (Mark All That Apply)

   - In Class
   - At Lunch
   - During Interval
   - Around Town
   - At Home
   - Other (Where?)
Think of the last time you were harassed by text-messaging. Please answer the following questions about that incident.

7. Did you know who was harassing you?
   □ Yes  □ No  □ Not Harassed by Text-messages
   If Yes, How many people were involved?:__

8. Was it someone from your school?
   □ Yes  □ No  □ Not Harassed

9. Gender of the person (people) harassing you: □ Female □ Male □ Both

10. Approximately how many harassing texts did you receive?________

11. Did you respond to the harassing texts?
    □ Yes, to all
    □ Yes, to some
    □ Yes, only to a few
    □ No

12. Did you respond immediately to the first harassing text? □ Yes □ No

13. Did you tell anyone about the harassment?
    □ Yes  □ No
    If Yes, Who_________________________

14. Did anything happen as a result of you telling?
    □ Yes  □ No
    If Yes, What_________________________

15. Do you think text-harassment has had any effect on you?
    □ Yes  □ No
    If Yes, What_________________________

16. Please explain what happened when you were harassed by textmessages. If you have not been harassed by text-messages please copy the following sentence into the box:
   "I have not been bullied by text-messages."

   ____________________________

17. What do you think your school could do to stop text-message harassment?
   ____________________________
II. TRADITIONAL BULLYING

Traditional bullying includes hitting, kicking, or the use of force in any way. It can also be teasing, making rude gestures, name-calling, or leaving you out. Bullying means that these things happened more than once and were done by the same person or persons and that the action either physically hurt you, or made you feel bad.

18. Have you been bullied this school year? [ ] Yes [ ] No
19. Have you bullied others this school year? [ ] Yes [ ] No

20. For the following items please use the scale below. For each form of traditional bullying write the number in the space that corresponds with on average how often you have experienced or used this form of bullying in the current school year. If you have not been bullied or bullied others in the current school year please put “1” in each square.

1 = not bullied this year
2 = only once or twice this year
3 = once a month
4 = 2 to 3 times a month
5 = once a week
6 = more than once a week

Form of Traditional Bullying | How Often
-------------------------------|-------------------
A. hitting (punching, kicking, shoving) | [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6
B. a knife or some kind of weapon was used on me | [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6
C. mean teasing | [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6
D. purposely left out of things | [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6
E. had my things damaged or stolen | [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6
F. was horribly sworn at | [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6
G. had offensive sexual suggestions made to me | [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6
H. had a nasty racial remark made to me | [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6
I. received nasty (poisonous) letter(s) | [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6
J. received nasty computer email messages | [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6
K. had untrue and mean gossip spread about me | [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6
L. I was threatened | [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6

21. If you were bullied this year, who did you tell? (Mark All That Apply)

[ ] [ ]  Have not been bullied this year
[ ] [ ]  Parents or guardians
[ ] [ ]  Class Teacher
[ ] [ ]  Duty Teacher
[ ] [ ]  Staff member at the school
[ ] [ ]  Friend
[ ] [ ]  Other
[ ] [ ]  No one

If you marked “No one” above, why did you not report the bullying?

______________________________
III Connections to School
For the following statements, indicate how much you agree with each one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. I feel close to people at my school.

23. I feel like I am part of my school.

24. I am happy to be at my school.

25. The teachers at my school treat students fairly.

26. I feel safe in my school.

27. In the last school year, did you have trouble getting along with one or more of your teachers?
   - Never
   - Less than once a month
   - Once or twice a month
   - Once or twice a week
   - Everyday

28. In the last school year, did you have trouble getting along with other students?
   - Never
   - Less than once a month
   - Once or twice a month
   - Once or twice a week
   - Everyday

29. In the last school year, did you feel that one or more of your teachers cared about you?
   - Not at all
   - A little bit
   - Not sure
   - Pretty much
   - Very much
IV. HOW ARE YOU DOING?

30. How are you doing? We are interested in how you have been feeling lately because this is often related to what is going on at school. Please circle the number for each statement which best describes how often you felt or behaved this way during the past week.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During the past week...</th>
<th>Rarely or none of the time</th>
<th>Some of the time</th>
<th>A lot of the time</th>
<th>Most or all of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. I did not feel like eating.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>(Less than 1 Day)</td>
<td>(1-2 Days)</td>
<td>(3-4 Days)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. I made up my mind quickly.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. I felt that I was just as good as other kids.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. I felt depressed.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. I did things without thinking.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. I felt hopeful about the future.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. I felt tearful.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. My sleep was restless.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. I was happy.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. I felt lonely.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. I enjoyed life.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. I felt that people disliked me.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. I acted on an impulse.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

V. DEMOGRAPHICS

Before turning this survey in to your teacher, please tell us a little about yourself.

31. Are you a male or a female? ☐ Male ☐ Female

32. How old are you? ___________ Years

33. Which grade are you in? (Circle one)

☐ 9th ☐ 10th ☐ 11th ☐ 12th

Thank you very much for helping us understand a little more about bullying and how it might make students feel.
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