

TRADITIONAL BULLYING AND CYBER-BULLYING: ARE THE IMPACTS ON  
SELF-CONCEPT THE SAME?

By

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## ABSTRACT

### TRADITIONAL BULLYING AND CYBER-BULLYING: ARE THE IMPACTS ON SELF-CONCEPT THE SAME?

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**Purpose:** Cyber-bullying is a serious matter involving a substantial number of middle school students. The frequency of cyber-bullying is becoming more prevalent, increasing the need for minors, parents, and school personnel to become more aware and educated on the issue (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between middle school students' self-concept, traditional bullying and cyber bullying.

**Method:** One hundred and sixteen sixth grade students in Rockingham County, North Carolina completed a questionnaire assessing their experiences with traditional bullying and cyber-bullying, followed by a self-concept measure.

**Results:** The results of this study indicate that there is a negative correlation between traditional bullying and self-concept. Additionally, those students who reported being a victim of both traditional bullying and cyber-bullying reported the lowest self-concepts of all participants.

**Conclusions:** Low self-concept is associated with being the victim of traditional bullying and cyber-bullying. As such, bullying prevention programs incorporated in school curriculums should address both traditional bullying and cyber-bullying. Implementation of programs to address low self-concept should also be incorporated into school curriculums to help address the impacts of traditional bullying and cyber-bullying. Moreover, educators and parents need to intervene in bullying incidents, a failure to do so may impact students' abilities to be happy and successful in their home and school environments.

**Keywords:** Traditional Bullying; Cyber-bullying; Self-concept; School Psychology

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

School teachers and administrators have been dealing with bullying for decades. This behavior, also called traditional bullying or “school yard bullying,” refers to the physical, verbal, or social abuse of an individual. Researchers realized the importance of this issue and began to study how traditional bullying impacted students. The empirical support for the negative impacts of traditional bullying is substantial. As technology evolved so too has the manifestation of this behavior and the need for further research.

The emergence of online social networking communities has created innovative ways to communicate with family, friends, and co-workers. Unfortunately for some individuals, this form of social networking has resulted in significant negative outcomes in the form of being victims of cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying is a relatively new phenomenon and researchers are beginning to study its etiology, potential consequences, and factors that may mediate its effects.

Cyber-bullying is also referred to as electronic bullying or online social cruelty through email, instant messaging, chat room conversations, on websites or gaming sites, and through digital messages or images sent through cellular phones (Kowalski, 2008). Cyber-bullying can have some of the same effects on children as traditional bullying. According to Kowalski, Limber, and Agatston (2008)

Cyber-Bullying can decrease self-concept, increase anxiety and depression levels, and result in higher absences from school.

Cyber-bullying has attracted attention from the media and administrators in academic settings. Although preliminary research suggests that this new form of bullying has some of the same negative effects as traditional bullying, additional research is needed to determine the extent that these effects may have on children. More importantly it creates challenges when determining if research available on traditional bullying can be applied to cyber-bullying. One area of particular interest to researchers is how cyber-bullying impacts an individual's self-concept. There is a large body of research identifying how traditional bullying impacts self-concept; however, the literature on cyber-bullying and self-concept is lacking.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Traditional Bullying*

"It's just harmless fun" and "Boys will be boys" are stereotypical responses expressed regarding bullying committed by children. With the increasing frequency of students engaging in bullying behaviors, this stereotypical view is no longer accepted within school systems. Three common types of bullying are social, verbal, and physical (e.g. Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Crick et al., 2001; Rigby & Slee, 1999; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Lagerspetz, 2000). The following sections will summarize empirical research on each of these types of bullying.

*Social Bullying.* Social bullying is aggressive behaviors that are indirect and result in harming an individual's psychological state and social connections. Indirect social bullying allows the bully to remain unidentified and the intended harm is delivered in a covert manner (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992). There are multiple forms of social bullying which include rumor spreading, backbiting, and social exclusion from peers. Manipulating one's social status, through changing the way others perceive that person, is the ultimate consequence of social bullying (Cole, Cornell, & Sheras, 2006).

Social bullying is most common among girls and has been found to have the same damaging effects as physical violence (Lagerspetz, et al., 1988). Girls

who engage in social bullying are most often in high social status and tend to target individuals they know (Lagerspetz, et al., 1988). Eleven to twelve year old girls appear to engage in social bullying more than boys, with a reported prevalence rate of one-third for girls and one-fifth for boys (Rivers & Smith, 1994). Two studies by Olweus (1993) also found that girls are more likely to experience social bullying than boys who are more likely to experience more physical and direct forms of bullying.

In comparison to physical and verbal bullying, social bullying occurs more often in the classroom setting. In summary, social bullying has been found to have similar damaging effects on victims as physical and verbal bullying. Social bullying is more common for females; however, both males and females report social bullying.

*Verbal Bullying.* Verbal bullying consists of teasing, taunting, or mocking the victim in a direct face to face manner (Cole, et al., 2006). The following behaviors are ways in which an individual can partake in verbal bullying; making rude remarks, telling hurtful jokes about an individual, threatening an individual, and calling an individual hurtful name/s. Verbal bullying can take the form of direct or indirect bullying. The bully can directly be verbally bullying a victim to their face, or indirectly bullying a victim, to other peers, behind the victim's back. The intent of verbal bullying is to intimidate a person, humiliate a person in front

of others, or to provide “humor” amongst a group at the expense of their reputation (Crick, et al., 2001; Lowenstein, 1977).

It is argued that social and verbal bullying are essentially the same constructs (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Underwood et al., 2001). The underlying difference between the two types of bullying is that social bullying can take the form of non-verbal bullying by adding in body movements such as eye rolling and giving dirty looks (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006), while verbal bullying requires the use of cruel verbal communication.

Verbal bullies often insist that they are only “joking around” or “having fun”, but the consequences of their actions go beyond simply having fun at the expense of another person (Cole, et al., 2006). The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development supported a survey of youth in grades six through tenth, in the spring of 1998 (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). The survey contained a sample of 15,686 students. The results found that both boys and girls were victims of verbal bullying. However, girls reported being the victim of verbal bullying such as rumors and sexual comments more often than boys (Nansel, et al., 2001). Belittling someone’s looks or speech was common between both sexes, along with negative comments about their religion or race (Nansel, et al., 2001). A similar study found that 71% of the middle school participants reported being victims of verbal

bullying at least once in their lives, and 26% of the participants reported witnessing verbal bullying at least once a week (DiBasilio, 2008).

Coyne, et al., (2006) suggest that verbal bullying is perceived to be more harmful by girls than boys. Coyne, et al., (2006) also reported that an adolescent girls perception of her social status is of higher importance to her self-concept than adolescent boys, and therefore, find verbal bullying more damaging to a girl's social status and more harmful than physical bullying. Although studies have found that girls report verbal bullying more often than boys, boys can still be victimized by verbal bullying.

Research has found that girls often do not report verbal bullying for fear that they will become a victim of the harassment and nothing will be done to prevent the verbal bullying from occurring in the future (Skiba, & Fontanini, 2001). Verbal bullying takes place just as often, if not more so, than physical bullying (Skiba, & Fontanini, 2001). The awareness of physical bullying is more abundant because physical bullying is easier to see and its consequences are often more apparent.

*Physical Bullying.* Physical bullying is a direct form of aggression. Face to face contact is necessary for physical bullying to take place and the victim is able to identify the person bullying him/her. This contact can take the form of hitting, punching, kicking, shoving, pinching, or any other behavior that can

inflict physical pain on an individual. Physical bullying is often referred to as “school yard bullying” and usually, like social and verbal bullying, involves a power imbalance between the bully and the victim, preventing the victim from defending him/her against the bully and repetition of the abuse (Rigby, 2001).

In 2001 an analysis of data was taken from a representative sample of 15,686 students in the grades 6<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup>. This analysis was conducted to assess bullying behaviors among US youth. Males reported being the victims of physical bullying more often than females. Sixty-six percent of the participating boys reported to have been the victims of hitting, slapping, and punching, while forty-four percent of the participating girls reported being the victims of the same behaviors (Nansel, et al., 2001). Parallel studies have found similar results. Lagerspetz et al. (1998), for example, also reported that among eleven and twelve year olds, there was more physical bullying between boys than between girls. Whitney and Smith (1993), Olweus (1978), and Smith (1991) also found comparable results in their studies on physical bullying.

Traditional bullying involves three forms of bullying. The research on these forms of traditional bullying is extensive and for the most part the results of the studies are consistent. Girls are more likely to engage in social and verbal bullying, while boys are more likely to engage in physical bullying. A strong societal interest in bullying came about in Sweden during the late 1960’s and

early 1970's (Olweus, 1993). This growing interest quickly spread to other areas of the country. The exact era that bullying in schools started is unknown.

However, it is apparent that schools have been dealing with traditional bullying for years. Recently a new type of bullying, cyber-bullying, is gaining increased attention in our school settings.

### *Cyber-bullying*

New technologies being used at home and in schools have made a new form of bullying possible. This technological form of bullying is known as cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying can also be referred to as electronic bullying or online social cruelty through email, instant messaging, chat room conversations, personal websites, gaming websites, pager messaging, and digital messages or images sent through cellular phones (Belsey, 2004; Kowalski, et al., 2007).

### *Forms of Cyber-Bullying*

Along with the multiple ways an individual can engage in cyber-bullying, according to Willard (2006) cyber-bullying can also take multiple forms including; flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing and trickery, exclusion and ostracism, cyber-stalking, and happy slapping.

*Flaming/Harassment.* Flaming is the act of exchanging negative emails. The negative emails can be exchanged between two or more people (Friedman & Curral, 2003; Harrison & Falvey, 2002; Landry, 2000; Markus, 1994; Moore,

Kurtzberg, Thompson, & Morris, 1999; O'Sullivan & Flanagin, 2003). There are different definitions of what “flames” are, but most studies indicate that “flames” are messages containing forms of hostility, aggression, intimidation, insults, sarcasm, and the use of unfriendly tones and uninhibited language (Turnage, 2008). Some characteristics of flaming messages can include: using all capital letters, excessive punctuation marks, and profanity (Turnage, 2008). Harassment can take the form of repeatedly sending emails that emotionally upset the recipient. The use of derogatory words and the repeated nature of the emails constitute the act as part of cyber-bullying (Wolak, et al., 2007).

*Denigration.* Denigration takes place when an individual posts hurtful lies about another individual online (Kowalski, 2009). Cyber-bullies can post fabricated stories about an individual on social networking sites, personal web pages, and on blogs. The victim of denigration may not be able to delete this information, because they do not always have access to the site where the wrongful information was posted.

*Impersonation.* Impersonation is the act of falsely identifying yourself as another person and posting information as if you were actually that person (Kowalski, 2009). Due to the inherent anonymity of the Internet, impersonation is relatively easy to engage in. It can be impossible to determine who has posted something and if the information is accurate. It is also possible to impersonate

someone through chat rooms. One case of impersonation, made popular by the media in 2008, involved two girls and one of the girl's mothers. Megan Meir, a 13 year old girl, committed suicide after she found out that Lori Drew, the mother of Megan's "best friend," had impersonated a young boy named Josh and pretended to like Megan before turning around and taunting her (Tresniowski, Truesdell, & Morrissey, 2008). This case was one of the first cyber-bullying cases to receive national attention.

*Outing and Trickery.* Outing and trickery involves sharing personal or embarrassing information about another person electronically (Kowalski, 2009). Outing can take place when an individual purposely exposes information about another individual without permission. The information can be passed on to other individuals through email, text messages, chat rooms, or the information can be posted on web pages or on blogs. Trickery takes place when an individual is purposely tricked into sharing private information and then that information is then shared with others without permission.

*Exclusion and Ostracism.* Exclusion and ostracism through usage of computer can take place by removing or blocking someone from buddy lists, chat rooms, Internet groups, or gaming websites (Kowalski, 2009). Exclusion and ostracism have been found to be very powerful acts of cyber-bullying. Studies have found that individuals who have been exposed to exclusion and ostracism for

a short period of time report worsened moods and lower levels of belonging, control, self-concept, and meaningful existence (Williams, 1997, 2001).

### *Similarities between Traditional and Cyber Bullying*

Cyber-bullying has been compared to traditional bullying in three ways. First the act takes the form of aggression intended to harm an individual (Kowalski, Limber, Zane, & Hassenfeldt, 2008). Even though cyber-bullying does not take the form of physical aggression, it is still a form of aggression expressed through electronic means. The negative emotions that cyber victims experience take the form of hurt feelings, embarrassment, crying, depression, anxiety, and lowered self-concept.

Second, the act of cyber-bullying is often repeated (Kowalski et al., 2008). Emails, text messages, posts in blogs, and comments on web pages can often be sent out multiple times, further tormenting the victim. Those same messages and posts can be sent as mass emails or text messages, further humiliating the victim by making their victimization known to multiple people. This is similar to traditional bullying in the sense that it can also be repeated and involves bystanders, people who see and are aware of the bullying.

Third, there is often an imbalance of power where the bully has more power than the victim (Kowalski et al., 2008). Generally, the cyber-bully asserts more power over the cyber-victim. This power can come in the form of having

more access to technology than the victim, which provides more opportunities to cyber-bully, having more knowledge of how to use technology to bully, and/or having the ability to cause the victim to fear reporting the act of being cyber-bullied or retaliating back against the cyber-bully.

### *Differences Between Traditional and Cyber Bullying*

Despite the similarities between traditional bullying and cyber-bullying, there are ways in which traditional bullying and cyber-bullying differ. First, with the exception of social bullying, verbal and physical bullying exposes the identity of the bully to the victim. Cyber-bullying allows the perpetrators to hide their identity through anonymous screen names, false identities, unidentified numbers, and through web pages with no creator identified. Kowalski and Witte (2006) found that 74% of the time the victims of cyber-bullying did not know the identity of the perpetrators. Being unaware of who is causing the harm can be very daunting for the victims of cyber-bullying, because they are left wondering as to the identity of the perpetrator and may even more helpless in their victimization (Kowalski, 2009).

Second, because of the ability to be anonymous, cyber-bullies will often go to extremes when taunting or tormenting their victims. Cyber-bullies might say and do things that they would not normally do if their identity were known to the victim (Kowalski, 2009). Being able to bully an individual without face to

face contact also eliminates the visual images of the victim's emotional reactions. The bully's self-regulatory process is often disregarded when they can not see the emotional impact their actions are having on the cyber-victim, thus allowing them to take their actions further than they may have if they were engaged in face to face contact with the victim (Kowalski, 2009).

Third, the victims of cyber-bullying lack the ability to escape from their cyber-bullies after school. Traditional bullying, for the most part, takes place at school and on school grounds; giving the victims a chance to retreat to a "safe" place after school hours. Cyber-bullying can occur anywhere at anytime. If an individual has a cell phone, Internet profiles, or email accounts, he/she is subject to cyber-bullying. Even if the individual turns his/her electronic devices off the sent messages, emails, and post are still viewable until the individual deletes them (Kowalski, 2009). The only way to avoid reading the messages sent by cyber-bullies is to dispose of one's electronic devices (cell phones, computers, etc.), but the perpetrators can still post messages and images on their web pages about an individual for the Internet community to see.

Fourth, reasons for not reporting being a victim of bullying differs for traditional bullying and cyber-bullying. The victims of traditional bullying often do not report the bullying because they do not want to be further victimized (Limber, 2002; Kowalski, 2009) and because they lack trust in the ability of

responsible adults to effectively intervene (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992; Kowalski, 2009). Victims of cyber-bullying also feel that their parents can not effectively intervene, but for different, personal reasons. For example, victims of cyber-bullying fear that their parents and teachers will take away their cell phones and Internet access, which diminishes their ability to socialize with their peers outside of the classroom (Keith & Martin, 2005; Kowalski, 2009). In this situation more emphasis is placed on what possessions the victim will lose, not on the extinction of the victimization.

#### *Internet Usage*

Internet usage among middle and high school students is widespread. Approximately 91% of children twelve to fifteen and, 99% of teens sixteen to eighteen use the Internet (Surveying the digital future, 2003), with a portion of the time spent on the Internet being used to socialize with peers through chat rooms or personal websites such as Facebook or Myspace. The Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 45% of the participants had their own cell phones and one third communicated through text messaging (Horrigan & Rainie, 2006).

I-Safe America, an internet safety education foundation, conducted a survey of 1,566 students from fourth grade to eighth grade to identify the experiences children nationwide have had with cyber-bullying (National i-Safe

Survey, 2004). The survey found that 57% of the participants had experienced cyber-bullying by having someone say hurtful things to them online. Thirty-five percent of the participants reported that they had been threatened online, and fifty-three percent of the participants admitted to having participated in cyber-bullying another individual (Keith & Martin, 2005). Thus, the issue of cyber bullying appears to be an issue that is impacting numerous students in our school system.

*Cyber-Bullying: The Bullies and the Victims*

*The Cyber Bullies.* Current research indicates that girls engage in cyber-bullying more often than boys (Keith & Martin, 2005; Kowalski & Limber, 2007). This is consistent with the research available that indicates girls are more likely than boys to rely on indirect forms of aggression (Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000; Bjorkqvist et al., 1992). Hiding behind cyber walls can be very powerful, because it allows an individual to express thoughts and ideas in ways he/she may not in face to face contact with peers. Cyber-bullies see themselves as anonymous entities, and for this reason may engage in bullying behaviors because they think their identity will not be discovered, there are no tangible consequences, and there are no boundaries as to what they can say and post about their peers (Keith & Martin, 2005).

Not only are the identities of cyber-bullies concealed, but so to are the impacts of their acts on victims. With the victim being out of visual sight, the act

of cyber-bullying is made easier by allowing the cyber-bully to hide behind technological devices. Because the cyber-bully does not see the impact his/her bullying behaviors have on the victim (e.g., crying, embarrassment, anger, emotional hurt) he/she is more likely to continue bullying the individual without empathy, regret, sympathy, remorse, or compassion toward the victim (Strom & Strom, 2005).

Blair (2003) indicated that cyber-bullying can start around the age of nine and will often peak in middle school. As children graduate from elementary schools to middle schools they spend more time on the computer, advancing their technological skills (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). As children enhance their computer skills they are also more likely to engage in social networking sites, such as Facebook and Myspace, which both offer a place to cyber-bully peers (Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

*The Cyber Victims.* Victims of cyber-bullying are not always forthcoming regarding their victimization. The National i-Safe Survey of 2004 found that out of 1,566 students, 58% of the participants that had experienced cyber-bullying had not told their parents or another adult about their online bullying experiences. Victims of cyber-bullying often feel that they cannot escape their bullies because the bullying behavior can follow them from school to their homes in cyber space and is not restricted to one physical location (Keith & Martin, 2005). Not only

are victims targets of cyber-bullying day and night, but electronic bullying messages and images are available to a wide audience (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Social networking sites such as, Myspace and Facebook are widely used internet sites that allow individuals to post pictures, blogs, comments, videos, and send private messages. If a user's profile is not set to private then anyone who has a profile can view his/her information. Controlling what other people post on personal profiles is almost impossible; further allowing individuals to become victims of cyber-bullying.

Research suggests that electronic bullying is a problem among middle school students. Most victims of cyber-bullying do not report their victimization to adults, in fear of losing their computer and cell phone access. Because some victims of cyber-bullying decline to report their victimization, the statistics on how many students have been victims of cyber-bullying may not be accurate and many not truly represent the precise prevalence of cyber-bullying among middle school students (Keith & Martin, 2005). Thus, the actual prevalence rate may actually be much higher than what has been reported in the research literature.

### *Regulation*

Adolescents today are part of the first generation to be raised with the Internet being a common feature in their lives. Computers and related technologies are becoming more widespread in classrooms and homes (Berson,

Berson, & Ferron, 2005). The increase in availability of online access has made it easy for students to engage in cyber-bullying behaviors. Even if students do not have a computer or the Internet at home the resources that are available in schools offer an opportunity for that individual to engage in or become a victim of cyber-bullying (Rideout, Foehr, Roberts & Brody, 1999).

Schools have taken some action to decrease children's engagement in cyber-bullying while on school property. Some schools require students to sign contracts stating that they will not use school Internet access for anything other than school related assignments (Fodeman, 2006). Other schools have blocked social networking sites from being available through school Internet access (Fodeman, 2006). Even with these precautions, cyber-bullying is still an issue given that adolescents are able to bypass these safety measures.

There is currently no single government entity or organization that is responsible for regulating the Internet, with the exception of child pornography and other criminalized behaviors. Most of what is posted on the Internet is protected by the First Amendment (Berson et al., 2005). Researchers and practitioners are still collecting data to help understand cyber-bullying and how to prevent its occurrence and intervene to help the victims (Kowalski, 2008). Research available on traditional bullying provides a starting point for researchers and practitioners, but the two types of bullying have different components and

may involve two very different types of perpetrators and victims (Kowalski, 2008). Cyber-bullying also exposes one's humiliation to a much greater audience than traditional bullying; therefore, there is a need for research to understand the impact that cyber-bullying has on victims (Goddard, 2008). It has been suggested that cyber-bullying can even be correlated with children's self-concept. There has been research on traditional bullying and self-concept, but more research is needed to investigate if the same self-concept issues, which arise from traditional bullying, are at play for the victims of cyber-bullying.

#### *Self-Concept*

*Self-concept.* Self-concept refers to how an individual evaluates their attributes. This can include one's perception of their physical appearance, moral beliefs, personal attributes, family life, and social situation dimensions (Craig, 1997; Kahtri, Kupersmidt, & Patterson, 2000; Olweus, 1989; Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1998; Slee, 1995). Self-concept is often predisposed by our sense of identity, which can be powerfully effected by the judgments other individuals make and/or social comparisons and perceptions (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Olweus, 1978).

*Low Self-concept.* The use of the term "self-concept" generally refers to the way one views themselves and the value that one places on their self as a person (Lim, Saulsman, & Nathan, 2005). Low self-concept is referred to as

having a generally negative overall opinion of oneself, judging oneself negatively, and placing a negative value on oneself as a person (Lim et.al., 2005). In essence, individuals with low self-concept usually hold negative beliefs about themselves, negative beliefs about what they are capable of, negative beliefs about different aspects of their life (academic, family, appearance, etc.), negative beliefs about the type of person they are, and negative beliefs about how others perceive them as a person (Lim et.al., 2005).

Low self-concept can impact various aspects of life. An individual with low self-concept may criticize themselves, they may doubt themselves, and even blame themselves when events in life take a wrong turn. Individuals with low self-concept may often feel sad, depressed, anxious, guilty, ashamed, frustrated, and angry (Lim et.al., 2005). A sense of low self-concept can cause an individual perform poorly in either their school or work. They may avoid challenges for fear of not doing well and they may find it hard to believe that they have any positive qualities or skills (Lim et.al., 2005).

*Adolescents and Self-concept.* Studies have found that one-third to one-half of adolescents struggle with low self-concept, especially in their early adolescent years (Harter, 1990; Hirsch & DuBois, 1991). The results of low self-concept for adolescents can be temporary; however, low self-concept can also lead to long lasting consequences such as, depression, anorexia nervosa,

delinquency, or in the most extreme case, suicide (Harter, 1990; Savin-Williams & Demo, 1983). It is important to note that a specific cause for self-concept is not certain.

Various gender and self-concept studies have found similar results. On average adolescent girls tend to have lower self-concept than adolescent boys (Baumeister, 1993; Pipher, 1994). Americans have placed a high emphasis on physical attractiveness for girls and often adolescent girls do not feel that they can reach that desired level of attractiveness. It has been hypothesized that the inability to live up to these high standards may correlate with a decrease in self-concept (Baumeister, 1993; Pipher, 1994). Unlike girls, boys do not place social status in a top hierarchical position. When boys are forced to deal with acts of bullying they tend to cope better with the negative consequences of bullying behaviors better than girls, because they do not see the consequences as being detrimental to their overall status in society (Coyne et al., 2006). Therefore, in general, boys do not report bullying behaviors to be as hurtful as girls do (Baumeister, 1993; Pipher 1994).

Research has found that there are multiple variables that impact an adolescent's self-concept. Performance in school, relationships with parents, relationships with peers, physical appearance, race, ethnicity, disabilities (cognitive or physical), and how one is treated by others can impact an

individual's self-concept (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Cast & Burke, 2002; Rigby, 2000; Colarossi & Eccles, 2000; Baumeister, 1993; Pipher, 1994; Umana-Taylor & Shin, 2007; Martin, Marsh, & Debus, 2001). Research has also found that traditional bullying and cyber-bullying are also two variables that can impact an individual's self-concept (Kowalski, 2008; Reece, 2008; Olweus, 1993; O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Rigby & Slee, 1992).

*Self-concept & Traditional Bullying.* A strong body of literature exists suggesting that children who have been the victims of bullying often have low self-concept (Austin & Joseph, 1996; Callaghan & Joseph, 1995; Mynard & Joseph, 1997; Neary & Joseph, 1994; Olweus, 1978; O'Moore, 1995; O'Moore & Hillery, 1991; Rigby & Slee, 1992). Studies have found that children who report being victims of bullying also report a lower self-concept than children who have never experienced bullying and children who are bullied frequently report lower self-concept than children who are occasionally victims of bullying (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001). Therefore an individual's self-concept, in relation to bullying, appears to rely on the degree to which an individual has been bullied (Rigby, 2000).

Similar to the research that has found girls engage in verbal and social bullying more often than boys, research has also found that girls, more often, feel that verbal and social bullying is more harmful to their overall mental health,

including self-concept (Coyne et al., 2006). Coyne et al., (2006) also found there were no differences between boys and girls in the perceived harmfulness of physical bullying. Current research has found that traditional bullying and low self-concept are correlated; however, there are controversial ideas about which variable causes or leads to the other. There is still an underlying question “Does traditional bullying cause or lead to lower self-concept or does low self-concept cause individuals to become bullies?” (Harter, 1990; Savin-Williams & Demo, 1983).

*Self-concept & Cyber-Bullying.* Research on cyber-bullying is limited, given the “newness” of this phenomenon (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Using what is currently known about traditional bullying may not be always be appropriate when addressing issues related to cyber-bullying.

There are reasons to be concerned with how cyber-bullying impacts adolescents, even on the lowest level. Youth in grades sixth through twelfth were surveyed about how cyber-bullying impacts adolescents. There were 931 children who completed the survey and it was found that victims of cyber-bullying experienced lower self-concept compared to children who had not experienced cyber-bullying (Kowalski, Limber, Zane, & Hassenfeldt, 2008).

In 2007 Hinduja, Patchin, and Denney examined the relationship between experiences with cyber-bullying and self-concept among middle school students.

A total of 1,963 middle school students from thirty schools were randomly selected for this study. It was found that low self-concept is associated with having experiences with cyber-bullying. Students who had experiences with cyber-bullying reported significantly lower self-concepts than those students who had little or no experiences with cyber-bullying (Hinduja, Patching, & Denney, 2009).

There is a lack of research that examines the difference of impact of self-concept between traditional bullying and cyber-bullying. Research strongly suggests that traditional bullying and cyber-bullying each impact self-concept; Additional research needs to be conducted to determine if one type of bullying has more impact on self-concept over the other. This empirical support would allow for better insight as how to treat perpetrators and victims of cyber-bullying and what prevention and intervention methods would be the most effective, especially in dealing with issues of self-concept.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

Cyber-bullying is a serious matter involving a substantial number of middle school students. A large percentage of students report being the victim of cyber-bullying and the reported numbers are likely an under representation of the true number of cases. Cyber-bullying and traditional bullying can impact a child's psychological and emotional welfare.

Current research indicates that well designed bullying prevention and intervention programs can reduce bully/victim problems and significantly improve the overall school environment (Elsea & Smith, 1998; Olweus, 1993). Researchers are still in the beginning stages of understanding cyber-bullying and the impact cyber-bullying has on individuals. Available research on traditional bullying provides a starting point for understanding components of cyber-bullying; however, the two types of bullying take different forms and can involve different groups of people (Kowalski, 2008).

The frequency of cyber-bullying is becoming more prevalent, increasing the need for children, parents, and school personnel to become more aware and educated on the issue (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Issues of respect for others on the Internet and clear stated rules for the use of the Internet at home and school are vital components in regulating bullying in cyber space (Franek, 2006). Increased knowledge about cyber-bullying and the subsequent impact, such as lower self-concept, will assist parents and school personnel with the development of methods for treating victims of cyber-bullying. Furthermore, additional research will allow researchers to determine if the findings for traditional bullying and self-concept can be applied to cyber-bullying and self-concept (Kowalski & Limber 2007).

Looking at how different forms of cyber-bullying impact self-concept will also be of benefit to children, parents, and school personnel. Given that there are different methods of cyber-bullying that students can engage in, it is important to know which forms, if any, are more harmful than others. If cyber-bullying over the Internet is more detrimental to a students' self-concept than cyber-bullying by means of cell phones, it will be important to address Internet cyber-bullying more intensively. Gaining insight as to how each form of cyber-bullying impacts students' self-concept will help guide prevention and intervention strategies for parents and schools.

Implementing appropriate prevention and intervention strategies may be beneficial to students in several ways. First, prevention and intervention programs provide students with social support that may assist them in finding ways to cope with cyber-bullying. Being able to use effective coping strategies may help decrease the impact of cyber-bullying on students' self-concept. Second, there are a lot of cyber-bullying cases that go unreported because students feel as though teachers and parents can not adequately stop this behavior. If students are aware of prevention and intervention programs then they may be more willing to come forward and report being the victims of cyber-bullying. It is important to let students know that cyber-bullying is wrong and that help is available if they find themselves becoming victims of cyber-bullying acts.

*Research Questions*

1. What is the association of cyber-bullying and traditional bullying to one's self-concept?
2. Is there an association between being a victim of cyber-bullying and being a victim of traditional bullying?
3. Which form of cyber-bullying (e.g., text messaging, email, chat room, instant messaging, etc.) occurs more frequently?

## CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

### *Participants*

Data for the current study were collected in the fall of 2010 and were provided by sixth grade students in Rockingham County, North Carolina. The sample was comprised of 70 female participants and 46 male participants, ranging in age from 11 to 13 ( $M = 11.3$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ). The sample was predominantly Caucasian/white (71.5%), followed by African American (12%), Bi-racial/Multi-racial (10%), Hispanic (2.5%), and Native American (2.5%). Ninety three percent of participants reported having a computer at home, 65% of participants reported having a personal cell phone, and 85% of participants indicated that the Internet was available in their home. Overall, there was a 39% completion rate from students. Thus, 116 out of 298 students provided data for this study.

### *Materials*

This study consisted of a three part survey questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to examine the participant's demographics, experiences with traditional bullying, experiences with cyber-bullying, and the participant's current level of self-concept. The questionnaire was written at the third grade reading level. Completion time for the questionnaire was about thirty minutes.

*Demographic Section.* The demographic portion of the survey consisted of questions assessing one's sex, age, and ethnic background. Participants were also

asked about access to a personal computer and ownership of a personal cell phone. In addition, participants were asked to report if they had access to the Internet in their home (see Appendix A).

*Traditional Bullying Scale.* The Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire, developed by Dan Olweus, was administered to assess the participant's experience with traditional bullying. The Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire includes forty items and is a reliable and valid self-report measure of bullying, that assess participants' experiences with bullying as victims and perpetrators, with an internal consistency of .80 to .90 (Olweus, 1996; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Only the ten questions assessing traditional bullying were used in this study, due to IRB stipulations. These ten questions allowed the participants to report how often they had been bullied and how often they had been victimized by certain types of traditional bullying. A few of these questions include "How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?" and "I was hit, kicked, pushed, spit at, shoved around, or locked indoors/outdoors?" The questionnaire was designed for ages 8 to 16. Participant's answers were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The response choices for these questions were: *it hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months, it has only happened once or twice, 2 or 3 times a month, about once a week, or several times a week.* As such, this study's ten item summary scale ranges from 1 to 5 for

each item and 10 to 50 for the entire scale, with a  $M = 14.06$  and  $SD = 5.53$ . For this study, higher values are representative of having more experience as a traditional bullying victim. The traditional bullying scale in this study revealed a Cronbach's  $\alpha = .882$ .

*Cyber-bullying Scale.* The next portion of the survey contained questions that measured the type of cyber-bullying the participant had experienced as well as how often the participant had participated in cyber-bullying. A Bullying Questionnaire created by Kowalski (2007) was used to assess the type of and amount of cyber-bullying. This scale was modeled after the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire and contains two parts. The psychometric properties of this scale are undergoing evaluation as of this writing; however, Kowalski reported adequate validity based on studies that have used the two part cyber-bullying scale (R. Kowalski, personal communication, February 3, 2009).

Questions were designed to assess that participants experiences with electronic bullying, both being bullied by and bullying others (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Key questions used to assess experiences with bullying include, "How often have you been electronically bullied in the past couple of months?" Items were also included to determine how the participants had been electronically bullied. Items such as, "Has anyone made fun of you or teased you in a hurtful way through e-mail, instant message, in a chat room, on a website, or

through text message sent to your cell phone?” were used to assess the type of electronic bullying the participants were victims of (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Only the ten questions assessing cyber-bullying were used in this study, due to IRB stipulations. These ten questions allowed the participants to report how often they had been electronically bullied and how often they had been victimized by certain types of electronic bullying. A few of these questions include “How often have you been bullied electronically in the past couple of months?” and “Has anyone told lies or spread false rumors about you or tried to make others dislike you through email, instant messaging, in a chat room, on a website, or through a text message sent to you cell phone?” Participants’ answers were scored on a scale of 1 to 5 points. The choice responses for these questions were: *it hasn’t happened to me in the past couple of months, it has only happened once or twice, 2 or 3 times a month, about once a week, or several times a week*. As such, the 10 item summary scale ranges from 1 to 5 for each item and 10 to 50 for the entire scale, with a  $M = 12.25$  and  $SD = 3.91$ . For this study, higher values are representative of having more experience as a cyber-bullying victim. The cyber-bullying scale for this study revealed Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .879$ .

*Self-Concept Scale.* The last portion of the survey consisted of the Piers-Harris Children’s Self-concept Scale – Second Edition. This sixty item scale was used to assess each respondent’s self-concept in the following areas: physical

appearance and attributes, intellectual and school status, happiness and satisfaction, freedom from anxiety, behavioral adjustment, and popularity. A total self-concept score was also derived to assess each participants overall self-concept. Participants' read statements and were asked to determine if the statement was true or false for themselves by answering "yes" if the statement was true or "no" if the statement was untrue. The following are examples of questions used to assess self-concept: "*I am smart*", "*I am good in my schoolwork*", "*People pick on me*", and "*I wish I were different.*" The primary standard score used to interpret the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale – Second Edition results is the normalized T-score ( $M = 50$ ,  $SD = 10$ ). Using a normalized T-score allows for comparisons as to where an individual's scores stands in relation to those of the typical child in the standardization sample. Participants' possible self-concept scores can range from  $\leq 29$  (very low self-concept) to  $\geq 70$  (very high self-concept) (Piers & Herzberg, 2002). For this study, the sixty item scale had a  $M = 54.58$  and  $SD = 9.46$ .

### *Procedure*

The survey was administered to middle school students who had given their assent (see Appendix C) and who had also provided parental consent (see Appendix B) to participate in the study. Attached to the parental consent form was a cover letter with information about the study (e.g., researcher name,

academic affiliation, purpose of the study, and contact information). Furthermore, if parents wanted access to the results of the study, they were to provide their contact information on the consent forms. Before the survey was administered, students were given verbal instruction regarding the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation and the ability to withdraw at anytime. All participants were given information regarding confidentiality and anonymity associated with their participation. Each participant received a cover letter attached to the front of the questionnaire restating the nature of the study and the anonymous structure of the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### *Data Analysis*

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS (version 15.0). A standard multiple regression was used to determine how much of the variance in self-concept could be explained by cyber-bullying and traditional bullying. Pearson's correlation was used to examine the relationship between reports of cyber-bullying and reports of traditional bullying. Lastly, frequencies were examined to determine which form of cyber-bullying was the most common reported by participants.

### *Results*

The primary question of interest in this study was how much does being the victim of cyber-bullying and traditional bullying relate to one's self-concept. The standard multiple regression revealed that the total cyber-bullying ( $M = 12.27$ ,  $SD = 3.93$ ) and total traditional bullying ( $M = 14.03$ ,  $SD = 5.5$ ) accounted for approximately 30% of the variance in self-concept,  $F(2, 113) = 23.82$ ,  $p < .001$ . There was a statistically significant relationship between traditional bullying and self-concept. Data analyses revealed that traditional bullying ( $\beta = -.692$ ,  $p < .001$ ) had more association with participant's self-concept than cyber-bullying ( $\beta = .247$ ,  $p < .029$ ). It is important to note that over 50% of the participants reported no experiences with cyber-bullying in the two months prior to

participating in this study. In addition, participants who reported a great deal of experiences with traditional bullying also reported many experiences with cyber-bullying.

Table 1

The associations of both forms of bullying and self-concept

Self-Concept Domains	Traditional Bullying	Cyber-bullying
Total Self Concept	-.516(**)	-.244(**)
Physical Appearance	-.382(**)	-.148
Intellectual Status	-.272(**)	-.032
Happiness & Satisfaction	-.522(**)	-.286(**)
Freedom from Anxiety	-.567(**)	-.331(**)
Behavioral Adjustment	-.320(**)	-.210(*)
Popularity	-.587(**)	-.273(**)

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

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The strength and direction of the relationship between cyber-bullying and traditional bullying was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a strong, positive correlation between the two variables,  $r = .710$ ,  $n = 116$ ,  $p < .001$ , with high levels of traditional bullying associated with high levels of cyber-bullying.

While reports of cyber-bullying were significantly lower than reports of traditional bullying, it is still important to explore which forms of cyber-bullying

were reported more frequently. Table 1 provides the number of participants that reported each form of cyber-bullying and a mean score that depicts the frequency of each participant's experience with cyber-bullying. A mean of 2 or greater indicates that participants reported having experienced a particular form of cyber-bullying once or more in the two months prior to completing the survey.

Table 2

Frequency of each form of cyber-bullying

Forms	# of Participants	Mean Score
Text Message	21	$M = 2.3$
Website	18	$M = 2.1$
Instant Messaging	15	$M = 2.5$
Email	15	$M = 2.3$
Another Form	15	$M = 2.3$
Chat Room	15	$M = 2.1$

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The data suggest that, among the sampled middle school students, traditional bullying is experienced more often than cyber-bullying and has a stronger relationship with self-concept. Approximately 72% of the students reported having experienced at least one form of traditional bullying in the two months prior to participating in the study, while 46% reported having experienced at least one form of cyber-bullying in the two months prior to participating in the study. The reported frequency of various types of cyber-bullying was low. However, it is important to note that all forms of cyber-bullying were experienced at least once by participants in the sixth grade. It is possible that the sampled students have had more experiences with cyber-bullying, although not within the prior two months.

Results of the multiple regression revealed that there was a statistically significant, negative relationship between traditional bully and self-concept. Additionally, the correlation between traditional bullying and self-concept was stronger than the correlation between cyber-bullying and self-concept. However, over 50% of the participants reported no experiences with cyber-bullying in the two months prior to participating in this study.

On the whole, there was a negative relationship between both forms of bullying and self-concept. If participants reported higher levels of either form of bullying, they also reported lower levels of self-concept. Individuals who reported being a victim of traditional bullying also reported being victimized in the cyber world.

During the early 1980's, researchers began to point out that low self-concept was one of the crucial predictors of many childhood problems that directly and obliquely impinge on academic performance of students (Seligman, 1995; Slee, 1995; Spencer et. al., 1993; Tesser, 1988; Underwood et. al., 2001). Most studies revealed a strong relationship between traditional bullying and lower self-concepts (Craig, 1997; Hirsch & DuBois, 1991; Hoover et. al., 1992; Olweus, 1978; O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Owens et. al., 2000; Peery et. al., 1988; Reece, 2008; Rigby, 2000; Rivers & Smith, 1994; W.J., Simmons-Morton & Scheidt, 2001). Similarly, the results of this study indicate that victims of both types of bullying have lower self-concepts than their same age peers who have not been victimized by bullies.

Furthermore, the current results support the theory that being a victim of bullying, particularly traditional bullying, negatively impacts the way students perceive their physical appearance, intellectual ability, school status, happiness, life satisfaction and popularity, as well as, increasing anxiety levels and

decreasing behavioral adjustment. Feelings of inadequacy, such as those listed above, increase the chances that a student will have low self-concept and increased behavior problems. These two factors alone can diminish a students' academic performance. These findings support the need for bullying prevention and intervention programs in schools that address bullying behaviors. Similarly, programs need to be available for students whom have been victimized by bullying to address decreased behaviors associated with a lower self-concept such as poor social skills, poor grades, decreased interest in once pleasurable activities, sadness, depression, anxiety, frustration, etc. (Lim et, al., 2005). These programs should help prevent ailing psychological health and the psychological costs of bullying in schools.

Additional analysis revealed that participants who reported being victims of traditional bullying also appear to be victims of cyber-bullying. It appears that technological devices (e.g., chat rooms, blogs, cell phones, social networking sites, and Internet e-mail) have only provided another avenue for students to be bullied.

Once a student has been identified as being a victim of one type of bullying, it is important to assess their experiences with the other form of bullying. The fact is that students are no longer just being bullied in the real world. Now students are being targeted in the cyber world as well, leaving no real

escape from bullies in today's increasingly technologically connected world. While victims of bullying were once able to retreat to the safety of their home, that safe place no longer exists. Access to the internet and cell phones has provided "unlimited admission" for bullies to victimize others.

The present study engaged the participation of only sixth grade students in twelve different classes. While reports of cyber-bullying were low, even at such a young age, students are already reporting experiences with both forms of bullying. As our society becomes more centered around technology, so do our schools. This exposes young students to electronic communication. As an educational tool, the Internet offers access to far-reaching resources and information which can lead to constructive educational experiences; however, this exposure also opens doors that allow students to be victimized through electronic means.

On the whole, the study accentuates the significance of educators intervening with traditional and cyber-bullying behaviors. While most cyber-bullying takes place outside of school, using personal electronic devices and Internet access, these behaviors still impact self-concept, essentially impacting the school environment. Moreover, as the current study points out, traditional bullying is still an issue for the education system to address. Substantially more students reported experiencing bullying that can be visible to educators (physical

aggression, having property damaged, being taunted verbally, etc.). It is therefore fundamental that the bullying curriculum presented in schools address both cyber-bullying and traditional bullying to ensure that students are educated on the consequences of such behaviors.

Conferences can be held for students, teachers and parents to discuss issues that contribute to bullying behaviors. The research is limited on behaviors and/or actions constitute as antecedents for bullying; however, some studies suggest that lack of supervision, life changing events (e.s., divorce, death of a loved one, relocation, etc.) mental disorders (e.s., conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, etc.), poor parental support, the lack of rules addressing bullying, and leniency for bullying behaviors by adults may often result in bullying (Kim, Leventhal, Koh, Hubbard, & Boyce, 2006; Morris, 2008) Once the antecedents to bullying have been identified, solutions can be developed to help students control their reactions to the antecedents, which will help decrease the consequences of acting on factors that lead to bullying. Helping students think in this way is a positive step towards intervening and preventing bullying behaviors. In this era of cyber-bullying, adults need to actively learn where students are electronically and become more familiar with technological devices. Participant reports indicate that all forms of cyber-bullying are used as a means to victimize others.

Results from this study indicate that verbal forms of bullying (e.g., gossip, mean names, lies, threats, etc.) are the strongest predictors of a lower self-concept. Consequently, technology has only increased the number of ways that bullies can verbally victimize others. Verbal bullying is no longer confined to the face-to-face verbal cruelty of rumors and gossip that were once only spoken. Now traditional verbal bullying has modified with our sophisticated technology. Verbal bullying now takes form in the way of text messages, chat rooms, email, social networking sites, and instant messaging. All of these are subject to more viewers and not just the individuals in hearing distance, increasing the overall impact on the victim. Therefore, it is important to be educated on how students are using all forms of technology (e.g. computers and cell phones) and how students can be potentially victimized through each form of technology.

### *Limitations*

There are several limitations that need to be considered with reviewing the results of this study. First, the sampling techniques employed do not allow for generalization to all public school students. A large number of parents and students opted out of participating in this study, decreasing the chances of generalizing these findings. Future research should duplicate this study in school districts that allow for a more diverse sample.

Another limitation was that the age of the selected sample was restricted. Further research should be conducted to determine at what age students have the most experiences with bullying and then attempt to examine the correlation between self-concept and bullying with students of that age. This study sampled a younger group of students. Older students are likely to have had more experience with Internet technologies.

It is also imperative to mention the intrinsic limitations of soliciting adolescents to self-report their own behaviors. Participation in cyber-bullying may have been underreported because of the predisposition of individuals to give socially desirable responses (Brownfield & Sorenson, 1993). In spite of these limitations, the current study does shed light on the experiences students are still having with traditional bullying and cyber-bullying in our school systems, despite laws and school policies.

There were also limitations that resulted from only using a portion of the traditional and cyber-bullying scales. Due to IRB stipulations and concerns about using two lengthy scales with a young age group, both scales were cut from forty items to ten items, resulting in assumed validity of both bullying scales. Eliminating thirty items from each scale decreased the amount of data collected. The items that were eliminated would have provided insight into where the bullying had occurred and if the victim of bullying had also been a bully to other

students. While the ten items that were used in the study revealed valuable information, the remaining thirty items in each scale would have provided information that would assist with planning interventions and prevention programs and strategies.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, based on the results of this study, it is apparent that traditional bullying is correlated with lower self-concept. While cyber-bullying was also correlated with lower self-concept, low reports of cyber-bullying offered little insight into the true impact that cyber-bullying has on an individual's self-concept. These findings have implications for students, teachers, and parents. Due to the negative impact that traditional bullying and cyber-bullying has on self-concept, which has also been found to decrease academic performance, it is important to take immediate action and address these issues. Given the frequency of both forms of bullying, students, teachers, school personnel, and parents have a responsibility to protect students from bullying of any form and to become more educated about what is taking place in our schools in relation to bullying behaviors.

Being educated about cyber-bullying and traditional bullying, the frequency of these behaviors in schools, how to prevent bullying, and how to address bullying that has already occurred will help reduce the occurrence of

bullying behaviors. School administrators should work towards providing resources to help educate students, teachers, and parents combat bullying. School administrators also need to work towards ensuring that school policies and rules address both types of bullying, as well as, ensuring that those policies and rules are upheld to ensure the physical and mental safety of all students. Additionally, parents should be vigilant about the possibility of their own children being victimized by means of the rapidly growing cyber world. According to Isaac Asimov (1992), “If knowledge can create problems, it is not through ignorance that we can solve them”.

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## Appendix A

**What is your grade level?**

Fifth  Sixth  Seventh  Eighth

**Are you a:** Boy  or Girl

**How old are you?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your ethnicity?**

Caucasian/white  Native American  African American   
 Latino  Hispanic  Bi-racial/Multiracial

Other (please list): \_\_\_\_\_

**How many best friends or do you have in your classes?**

- None
- I have 1 best friend in my classes
- I have 2 or 3 best friends in my classes
- I have 4 or 5 best friends in my classes
- I have 6 or more best friends in my classes

**Do you have a personal cell phone?**

Yes  No

**Do you have a computer at home?**

Yes  No

**Do you have the Internet at home?**

Yes  No

## Appendix B

### Parent Consent Form

My name is Heather Hines. I am a School Psychology Graduate student at Western Carolina University and I am currently working as a school psychologist intern with Rockingham County schools. I am conducting research to see how cyber-bullying impacts the self-concept of middle school students. I am interested in how the impacts of cyber-bullying on self-concept differ from the impacts of traditional bullying on self-concept.

Your child's involvement in this project involves answering a series of general questions about his/her experiences with traditional bullying and cyber-bullying. There will also be a set of questions that will aim to assess his/her self-concept. All materials have been approved by Mrs. Cindy Corcoran, principal of Rockingham County Middle School. The survey will take no longer than 30 minutes to complete. Your child's participation is voluntary and is not part of their school curriculum. You may withdraw your child at any time or decline to allow your child to participate. Your child will have the option to bring the questionnaire home to complete and return it to his/her teacher the following day if he/she is uncomfortable answering the questions in the presence of his/her peers. Your child's responses will be kept strictly anonymous. No student will be asked to provide identifying information on the questionnaire. All surveys will be kept in my personal locked filing cabinet for seven years.

There might be a chance that your child may experience some emotional distress while answering questions about bullying if he/she has been the victim of bullying or if he/she has acted as the bully against other students. If your child presents any observable signs of emotional distress while participating in this project he/she will be privately referred to the School Psychologist, Jill Bullock, for additional psychological assistance. It is important to note that allowing your child to participate in this project will give him/her the chance to speak out about his/her experiences with bullying. Bullying reports, combined from all students, will also provide school personnel with vital information about the prevalence of bullying in the school setting. This information can help the school district implement prevention and intervention programs that address bullying issues within the school. These procedures will ultimately provide your child with a safer school and home environment.

If you have any concerns about how your child was treated during this study, you may contact the Chair of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review

Board, a committee that oversees the ethical dimensions of the research process. The Institutional Review Board office can be contacted at 828-227-7212. This research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board.

If you would like to discuss this research at any time, you should contact me at 828-736-5707 or my co-investigator, Alvin Malesky, Department of Psychology, Western Carolina University, 828-227-3357. You will have two weeks, before the survey is conducted, to contact me if you have any questions regarding this research. If you have any additional questions, you can reach the Chair of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board at 227-3177.

**Please complete the portion of the consent form below:**

I do  or do not  give my permission to the investigators to use my child's responses for their research.

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

## Consent Form

**What is the purpose of this research?**

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the impacts traditional bullying and cyber bullying have on and individuals self-concept.

**What will be expected of me?**

You will be asked to complete a brief survey. The survey will ask you questions about your experiences with traditional bullying and cyber bullying. There will also be some questions concerning the way you feel about yourself.

**How long will the research take?**

Completing the survey will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

**Will my answers be anonymous?**

Yes. Your name will in no way be used in this study nor will it be on your surveys.

**Can I withdraw from the study if I decide to?**

Yes. If you decide to discontinue your participation in this study you may stop at any time without penalty.

**Is there any harm that I might experience from taking part in this study?**

No. There is no foreseeable harm to you from participating in this study.

**How will I benefit in taking part in this research?**

Your participation in this research will allow you the opportunity to report any experiences you have had with bullies. Your answers will help researchers determine the extent to which middle school students experience traditional bullying and cyber bullying and how those experiences impact an individual's self-concept.

**Who should I contact if I have any questions or concerns about the research?**

If you have any concerns about how you were treated during the experiment, you may contact the office of the IRB, a committee that oversees the ethical dimensions of the research process. The IRB office can be contacted at 828-227-3177. This research project has been approved by the IRB.

If you would like to discuss this research at any time, you should contact me, Heather Hines, at 828-736-5707 or my co-investigator, Alvin Malesky, Department of Psychology, Western Carolina University, 828-227-3357. If you have any additional questions, you can reach the Chair of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board at 227-3177.

**Participant Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_