The Effects of Cyberbullying as it Relates to Social Media: A California High School Assistant Principal and High School Counselor Perspective

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The Effects of Cyberbullying as it Relates to Social Media: A California High School
Assistant Principal and High School Counselor Perspective

A Dissertation by

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Irvine, California
School of Education
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership
January 2020

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The Effects of Cyberbullying as it Relates to Social Media: A California High School
Assistant Principal and High School Counselor Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The Effects of Cyberbullying as it Relates to Social Media: A California High School Assistant Principal and High School Counselor Perspective

by Rodney C. Stone

Purpose. The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the perceptions of high school assistant principals and high school counselors regarding the impact of cyberbullying on high school students in southern California. The study also sought to identify strategies and prevention programs essential to counteract cyberbullying as perceived by high school assistant principals and high school counselors.

Methodology. A qualitative methodology was used with data collected through interviews and review of artifacts. High school assistant principals and high school counselors voiced their perspectives and personal views relative to the strategies and prevention methods to counteract cyberbullying. The interviews and artifacts were coded and analyzed for common themes and patterns.

Findings. The findings revealed both high school assistant principals and high school counselors demonstrated efforts to counteract cyberbullying among current and future high school students to be better prepared for cyberbullying incidents. Both current and future students also need training in critical thinking processes that influence them to be resilient against cyberbullying.

Conclusions. The results of this study found school districts need assistance in designing leadership development strategies and support systems for students to counteract cyberbullying. Suicide prevention and resiliency training programs are also needed for students and to develop critical thinkers within the community.
**Recommendations.** Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended school districts implement a conflict resolution training program, increase the level of consequences for students who cyberbully, offer resiliency classes for students and parents, increase collaboration between high school assistant principals and high school counselors, implement mandatory suicide prevention classes in school orientations and parent workshops, hold students accountable for their behavior, provide peer-led training intervention and prevention events, increase the awareness and knowledge of netiquette among high school students, and help parents develop a plan to effectively monitor their child’s cell phone and internet activities.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Digital technology made the world an increasingly connected place. The use of cell phone technology and the internet dramatically increased since 2010. The number of smartphone users increased globally from 62.6 million in 2010 to 224.3 million in 2016 (Internet Live Stats, 2016). Over the last 25 years, the expansion of communication technologies spanned the globe, connecting 2.32 billion people and changing how people communicate (Internet Live Stats, 2016). In 2016, 88.5% of the U.S. population had access to the internet with 324,118,787 million users.

The rise of new and improved communication software made it easier than ever for people to stay in touch with friends and family members and to meet new people from around the world. However, this high level of connectedness also had negative consequences, such as the development of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has become more common as access to technology and social media increase, especially among teenagers (Carter, 2015). Stories about anonymous harassment and its devastating impact on victims highlight some of the dangers of advanced communication software. The prevalence of antagonistic communication increased because it is often anonymous, making people less accountable for their rude and irresponsible comments (Willard, 2007).

Cyberbullying takes multiple forms, with assertive and aggressive communication being two of the most common (Willard, 2007). Other factors associated with cyberbullying include expressions of bigotry, hazing, sexual harassment, threats of harm to the victim’s reputation, and threats to physical safety and privacy (Allanson, Lester, & Notar, 2015). The emergence of cyberbullying through evolving communication
software and social media creates new challenges related to finding appropriate solutions, preventing cyberbullying, and counteracting its damaging effects (Sabella, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2013; Wong-Lo, Bullock, & Gable, 2011).

The concept of bullying is universal; the 1990s saw an increase in physical safety programs trying to prevent traditional acts of bullying (Olweus, 1995). Although these programs successfully reduced the prevalence of schoolyard violence, the rapid growth of the internet allowed bullying behavior to move online (Olweus, 1995). Access to the internet and social media provided aggressors with more opportunities to engage in cyberbullying activities while maintaining anonymity (Brighi, Guarini, Melotti, Galli, & Genta, 2012; Serif et al., 2015).

The impact of cyberbullying is detrimental to the emotional health of school-aged children and adults (Patchin, 2015). Children and adults who experience cyberbullying through social media react emotionally to the negative statements and behaviors of the perpetrators (Patchin & Hinduja, 2011). Victims of cyberbullying harbor feelings of hostility toward the perpetrator because of personality differences and because of the lack of concern for internet etiquette and discipline (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005). The consequences of cyberbullying are psychologically damaging and can be fatal; documented effects of cyberbullying include suicidal ideation and the development of suicidal tendencies (Olweus, 1994).

The reach of the internet and prevalence of mobile technology make it difficult to detect and prevent cyberbullying acts in public school settings (Schell, 2016). Although most school districts enacted policies regarding the prevention of and consequences for traditional bullying, many school district policies still lack specific contingencies for
cyberbullying (Schell, 2016). Often, high school victims of cyberbullying incidents may attempt to reach out to school counselors for assistance, making the counselor the initial point of contact to report the violation of the school policy (Midgett, 2016). High school assistant principals and school counselors play an essential role in combatting cyberbullying, providing intervention and support for victims.

**Background**

In the last few years, the effects of cyberbullying through social media emerged into the public consciousness (Roberts, 2016). Improvements in and increased access to digital platforms enable people to bully, stalk, and harass others through threatening phone calls, internet messages, emails, and social media posts. Recent coverage of cyberbullying focused on its adverse outcomes for victims, including anxiety, depression, suicidal ideations, and suicidal attempts (Fremouw, Keelan, & Schenk, 2013). Despite the devastating effects of cyberbullying acts, California lacks updated school policies about cyberbullying and policies and personnel specifically dedicated to regulating cyberbullying issues are nonexistent.

The literature offers multiple definitions of cyberbullying. Gable, Snakenborg, and Van Acker (2011) defined cyberbullying as the demonstration of inflammatory communication by individuals through electronic software such as posting threatening or embarrassing messages that may be vulgar or harmful to one’s image or emotions. Feinberg and Robey (2009) defined cyberbullying as “the sending or posting of harmful text and images using the internet by use of digital communication devices, such as cell phones” (p. 3). Burns (2012) described cyberbullying in comparison to 10 standard forms: harassment, email and mobile image dissemination (e.g., sexting), email threats,
flaming, exclusion, outing, phishing, impersonation, denigration, and images and videos. Other terms used almost interchangeably with cyberbullying are electronic bullying, digital bullying, social media bullying, and cell phone bullying (Schell, 2016).

**Emergence of Cyberbullying**

In the past, psychological and physical bullying took place in the schoolyard or neighborhood, where the issue remained within the local community (Bartkiewicz, Boesen, Greytak, Kosciw, & Palmer, 2012). Solutions were simple as high school assistant principals and school counselors could take disciplinary action and parents could be notified of their child’s suspension or expulsion from school grounds (Smahel & Subrahmanyam, 2011). However, in the last 25 years the expansion of internet software platforms and programs allowed bullying to take on a new form, known today as cyberbullying. The pervasiveness of technological advances expanded the scope of cyberbullying to such an extent it is a critical issue today. One factor in the increase in cyberbullying is the degree to which technology provides quick access to victims while limiting the community’s ability to identify perpetrators or hold people accountable for their actions (Center for Disease Control, 2008). Because most American students have access to mobile devices or computers, including convenient access to social media websites, chat rooms, and email, cyberbullying is becoming ever more prevalent (Carter, 2015).

Digital technology was initially not recognized as a tool to bully others, and language use was limited in the era of early internet communications (Esin, 2017). However, the situation changed with the development of smartphones, updated internet programming, and social media software. Between 2003 and 2007, access to the internet
became much more streamlined with more and new ways to communicate and share information (Esin, 2017). With increased access to social media, individuals and groups could efficiently target others from anonymous websites, setting the stage for a cyberbullying attack (Bossler, Holt, & Seigfried-Spellar, 2015).

**Impacts and Effects of Cyberbullying**

The internet was developed as a research tool to share scientific information, solve problems, and support a collaborative environment (Carter, 2015). The internet was not designed to be a communication and social media tool and was never intended to judge the behavior of individual users. However, the expansion of the internet to the general public opened the door for negative and hateful interactions. Research showed cyberbullying is a severe problem affecting the performance of students and employees in any environment (Banks, 1997; Nansel et al., 2001). Victims of cyberbullying experience depression, anxiety, paranoia, anger, and isolation, as well as decreased academic performance and increased thoughts of suicide (Crosslin & Golman, 2014; Fremouw et al., 2013; Mitchell, 2017).

Although many school districts establish policies governing the appropriate use of school technology, high school assistant principals, school counselors, teachers, and other administrators are unable to regulate perpetrators’ off-campus behavior (Smahel & Subrahmanyam, 2011). When instances of cyberbullying are not efficiently identified and quickly resolved, the cycle of cyberbullying continues and the victim stops reporting the problem (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). Cyberbullying impacts people of all ages and in all manner of organizations where victims are perceived as weak and unable to stand up for
themselves (Carvalho et al., 2008). In public schools, assistant principals and school counselors must intervene to protect students and prevent future cyberbullying acts.

**Theoretical Foundations**

The theoretical foundations guiding this study are 1. social dominance theory (Levin, Pratto, & Sidanius, 2006), 2. humiliation theory (Leask, 2013), and 3. organizational culture theory (Miner, 2007). Social dominance theory highlights the character of prejudice and discrimination on different platforms concerned with social status (Pratto & Walker, 2004). Humiliation theory deals with the emotional reaction to psychological attacks by individuals with power and influence within a local community (Leask, 2013). Organizational culture theory examines a structure of shared values by looking into intergroup dynamics or cultural beliefs (Miner, 2007). These theories collectively serve as a platform to view cyberbullying acts originating from social groups and from individuals who possess a high social status.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

The theoretical frameworks guiding this study are social disorganization theory (Bruinsma & Johnson, 2018) and choice theory (Craven, Espelage, & Rao, 2012). Social disorganization theory highlights deviant behaviors that often occur in social institutions such as schools (Triplett, 2018). Social media aggression may be considered the new style of bullying and researchers across the U.S. are studying its traumatic effects (Austin & Jordan, 2012). The social disorganization framework suggests rapid changes and updated technology disrupted the norms of average users. The theory focuses on the laws, policies, and roles of schools related to cyberbullying (Austin & Jordan, 2012). Social disorganization theory indicates cyberbullying is an emerging issue in the field of
education, where the practice creates a disruption in student learning. Social
disorganization theory at the school level is aligned with the need for partnerships
between certified assistant principals, school counselors and parents.

Choice theory focuses on the individual’s ability to control his or her behaviors by
choosing when and how to implement emotions concerning aggressive acts from others
(Craven et al., 2012). Choice theory is considered instrumental in manufactured conflict
because it brings out the logical approach to cyberbullies and limits to develop a solution
(Elster & Hylland, 1986). This form of external control psychologically influences others
to do their mischievous bidding (Glasser, 1999). Choice theory operationalizes
components of cyberbullying regarding manipulating others and pitting people against
each other. The use of these two theories collectively serves as a lens to view
cyberbullying as an issue in schools, a sign of disorder resulting from negative behaviors
and attitudes generated by internal defense mechanisms.

**Federal Laws**

The adverse effects of cyberbullying demonstrate a need to reevaluate laws to
prevent this form of harassment in schools, communities, and the workplace (Banks,
1997). Currently, no federal laws or regulations specifically address cyberbullying (U.S.
Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Federally, anti-bullying laws only
cover the term *harassment* based on Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its
protected classes such as race, age, sex, gender, religion, and disability. In the instance of
harassment and discrimination, the federal government could intervene in resolving
bullying issues (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). The challenge
with introducing laws restricting cyberbullying stems from the right to free speech in the
First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. A bill proposed to regulate cyberbullying could be an infringement upon a person’s First Amendment rights.

**California State Laws**

California state laws related to cyberbullying are limited to education. California Education Code 48900 Part (R) and series 48900 1-9 reference bullying and internet harassment. However, some state regulations and local laws prohibit school districts from intervening in bullying issues (Schell, 2016), which presents an obstacle to regulating this type of inflammatory communication. Bell, Springer, and Stuart-Cassel (2011) examined state laws related to bullying and found 46 states had adopted anti-bullying laws by 2011. The effort of these states adopting such laws suggest the issue of cyberbullying presents a severe problem (Greene & Ross, 2005).

**School Policies**

School policies effectively reduced traditional bullying on campuses (Campbell, 2005). School policies develop from structured consultation with other education professionals (Sharp & Smith, 2008). In retrospect, it could be assumed school policies regarding cyberbullying could have similar origins. However, few schools adopted policies specifically related to cyberbullying. Thus, high school assistant principals, school counselors, and school boards play a role in drafting policies to reduce cyberbullying and internet harassment (Li, 2006). Initial steps in changing school policies related to cyberbullying would include investigating current systems and encouraging high school assistant principals and school counselors to evaluate the language concerning consequences and resolutions. Such actions could prevent future instances of cyberbullying.
Role of High School Assistant Principal

The assistant principal role in high school is to implement prevention and intervention strategies from a disciplinarian approach. High school assistant principals are a valuable part of leadership in the education profession and serve multiple roles as instructional leaders, administrators, and disciplinarians. Assistant principals are a major part of the instructional leadership team and must be ready to assume all responsibilities of the principal in the event of absence or illness (Shoho & Sun, 2017). High school assistant principals must possess a California Administrative Credential, allowing them to perform duties of a school administrator. Also, with this certification, assistant principals may work with the principal in interviewing and evaluating the school staff, disciplining students, and investigating incidents on campus. High school assistant principals are charged with the emotional well-being and physical safety of students; thus, they need to immediately address incidents of cyberbullying (Moore, 2017).

High school assistant principal role in cyberbullying. High school assistant principals educate students and parents about cyberbullying and hold students accountable for their actions. Because cyberbullying incidents influence the learning environment and the safety of students, administrators are held accountable by their school districts to address cyberbullying incidents (Moore, 2017). Furthermore, high school assistant principals must promote the safety of students and initiate contingencies to leverage against perpetrating students and their parents for acts related to cyberbullying. To effectively combat cyberbullying, high school assistant principals need clear policies to follow and a strategy to implement disciplinary actions to the student body. Therefore, the role of the high school assistant principal in cyberbullying is
to immediately respond to cyberbullying incidents, conduct a thorough investigation, and administer consequences to the perpetrator.

**Role of High School Counselors**

High school counselors provide counseling assistance to students on a multitude of topics (American School Counselor Association, 2017). High school counselors are required to possess a California Pupil Personnel Services (CPPS) credential, allowing them to provide counseling services and implement a variety of prevention and intervention strategies. With this certification, counselors train teachers and parents on issues related to student needs. High school counselors, charged with the emotional well-being and physical safety of students, need to immediately address incidents of cyberbullying (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).

High school counselors assist students with their personal and career development goals to help them become productive members of society (American School Counselor Association, 2017). High school counselors’ additional duties include assisting administrators to resolve student conflicts, maintaining student records, providing suggestions to teachers concerning classroom management, and providing counseling to students with disciplinary problems (American School Counselor Association, 2017). High school counselors can obtain specific certifications to perform mediation sessions and resolve conflicts between students (Muller-Ackerman, Pellitteri, Shelton, & Stern, 2006).

High school counselors spend most of their time focused on the development and implementation of counseling curricula and services provided to students (American School Counselor Association, 2017). School counselors also advocate for students to
ensure their educational needs are met and they stay on the path toward their goals (Muller-Ackerman et al., 2006). High school counselors can perform small-group counseling for students and parents; however, initial concerns about confidentiality when performing these group sessions limit their use (Crothers et al., 2017). High school counselors often serve as trusted mentors and role models because of their neutral position between the administration, teachers, and other students.

**Role of the high school counselor in cyberbullying.** Through educating students and parents about cyberbullying and holding them accountable for their actions, school counselors aim to reduce the number of disciplinary issues and suspensions stemming from bullying and cyberbullying (Negron, Simonsen, & Sugai, 2008). A clearly developed intervention plan helps promote the safety of individual victims and initiate contingencies to leverage against perpetrating students and their parents; such intervention plans help teenage victims to recover emotionally, socially, and academically without further bullying (Carter, 2015). High school counselors must directly report any incident of bullying or cyberbullying to the administrator once a student files a report (Bauman, 2011). Therefore, high school counselors and their role in cyberbullying should immediately address cyberbullying incidents, swiftly record violations, and administer consequences to the perpetrator.

**Gap in the Literature**

Cyberbullying became extremely noticeable in recent years because of convenient access to social media websites, chat rooms, and email (Carter, 2015). Cyberbullying impacts people of all ages and in all types of organizations where victims are perceived as unable to stand up for themselves (Carvalho et al., 2008). Victims of cyberbullying
experience adverse consequences. When cyberbullying incidents occur at schools, it is often the responsibility of high school counselors to resolve conflicts (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). However, little research exists examining the role of high school counselors in handling instances of cyberbullying. Juvonen and Gross (2008) questioned the comfort levels of students in talking with authoritative figures, such as high school counselors, about cyberbullying. Additionally, Mitchell and Ybarra (2004) noted significant gaps in the literature regarding cyberbullying and recommended additional research to assist students, educators, and other stakeholders in preventing cyberbullying.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

The adverse effects of long-term cyberbullying impact the victim’s sense of self-worth (Ali, 2010). This type of harassment also leads to depression, anxiety, anger, and isolation (Crosslin & Golman, 2014; Fremouw et al., 2013). Cyberbullying is especially harmful to high school students (Mitchell, 2017). Failure to immediately address these issues can create adverse emotional effects on students, leading to long-term victimization (Mitchell, 2017). Cyberbullying can result in students feeling depressed and paranoid to the point their academic performance declines (Fremouw et al., 2013).

Research showed high school assistant principals and high school counselors failed to educate students on the consequences of cyberbullying (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). School administrators are mandated by California law to update their bullying prevention programs to counter cyberbullying issues and inform students of possible consequences (Schaefer-Ramirez, 2017). Hoff and Mitchell (2009) suggested, “Schools may be unwittingly reinforcing a code of silence among students by sending messages such as don't be a tattletale or fight your own battles” (p. 660). The authors further outlined an
essential need to pay more attention to educating students on the consequences of cyberbullying (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). In line with the need to inform students of cyberbullying and its indirect consequences, G. Anderson (2007) underlined a similar conclusion for school administrators and staff—a need to address the problem of increasing cyberbullying and its effects on students, and to make necessary recommendations for handling cyberbullying issues.

Victims and bystanders of cyberbullying often do not report incidents because of fear of non-acceptance or retaliation (G. Anderson, 2007). Cyberbullying is a worldwide problem, especially with the risk of suicidal ideation and behavior among students (Marr & Field, 2001). However, school administrators often do not take cyberbullying seriously or handle reports confidentially (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).

Traditional bullying prevention programs reduced physical bullying in schools (Olweus, 1993). However, it has yet to be determined how well traditional anti-bullying programs work against cyberbullying (Mitchell, 2017). Overall, research and theoretical applications concerning cyberbullying prevention programs have been limited (Schaefer-Ramirez, 2017). The current state of practice by school counselors is found to be mostly improvisational or reactive and, at best, based on anecdotal evidence of active practice (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Relative to the lack of existing research in this field, there is also a lack of evidence-based indicators of cyberbullying in high schools to act as practical reference guides for assistant principals and school counselors to take proactive action (Couvillon & Ilieva, 2011; Diamanduros et al., 2008). Clear research in this context is critical to understanding cyberbullying and how it can be prevented in high schools.
Additionally, research thus far failed to consider teacher perceptions regarding school policies and procedures for programs targeting cyberbullying (Stauffer et al., 2012). This knowledge gap presents itself as a substantial problem as there is a need for prevention strategies to foster greater buy-in on the part of school administrators to improve intervention fidelity and effectiveness focused on decreasing cyberbullying (Stauffer et al., 2012). Challenges emerge from research when confronted with acts of cyberbullying, and it is crucial to engage high school assistant principals, school counselors, and teachers on how to effectively address the issue in the education profession.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the perceptions of high school assistant principals and high school counselors regarding the impact cyberbullying has on students in southern California. The study also sought to identify strategies and prevention programs essential to counteracting cyberbullying, as perceived by high school assistant principals and high school counselors.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do high school assistant principals and high school counselors describe cyberbullying in southern California high schools?

2. What do high school assistant principals and high school counselors perceive as the impact of cyberbullying on high school students?

3. What do high school assistant principals and high school counselors perceive as strategies essential to counteract the effects of cyberbullying on students?
Significance of the Problem

The emergence of cyberbullying stems from a cultural shift from face-to-face interactions to technology-based interactions. Cyberbullying emerged as the new generational bullying tactic to intimidate and harass victims who cannot defend themselves (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Hinduja and Patchin (2012) described cyberbullying as repeated use of electronic devices to harm other people. Increased use of social networking and access to the internet, combined with the prevalence of mobile phones and tablet computers, garnered considerable media attention as cyberbullying becomes a hot topic for schools due to its adverse emotional effects. Cyberbullying in a school environment is a new form of bullying according to high school assistant principals and school counselors who are yet to determine the most appropriate steps to resolve this conflict in the school system (Belsey, n.d.). As a result, few intervention strategies exist concerning cyberbullying (Beran & Li, 2007).

Cyberbullying disrupts the school climate, which negatively affects the emotional well-being of students. School counselors must earn the trust of the students and parents to work together to hold bullies accountable for inflammatory communications through social media (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Revision of school and district policies is necessary to develop an electronic communications policy that holds students accountable for their online behavior both inside and outside school grounds.

More research is needed to explore cyberbullying and current trends of internet harassment. This research could be beneficial to society by getting parents involved and influencing schools to share their policies on cyberbullying. Such research could prove valuable in defining the responsible use of social media by students under the age of 18.
(Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). It teaches other students how to recognize a victim of cyberbullying and confront the incident. It is imperative to analyze the available strategies and conduct more research to prevent all forms of cyberbullying in schools and the community (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). The ultimate benefit to society is to convince students to report cyberbullying acts to authority figures.

This study examined the effects of cyberbullying and social media to provide new information about prevention methods to support high school assistant principals and school counselors. This qualitative research explored critical issues regarding the impact of cyberbullying, social media, and the responsibilities of high schools. This study could help high school assistant principals, school counselors, and researchers focus on the needs of students. High school assistant principals, school counselors, and other administrators could benefit from this study by creating a standard operating procedure to enable them to adequately intervene to protect victims and prevent future cyberbullying acts. Finally, this study could also benefit the broader community, including child protective services, law enforcement, and social workers, in preventing and resolving instances of cyberbullying.

**Definitions**

**Cyberbullying.** Any electronic communication that includes harassment, threats, or the posting of demeaning pictures or memes on websites or via text messages (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011).

**Administrator.** An individual who performs management and operational duties within a school setting. Principals and assistant principals possess the decision-making authority when distributing rewards and punishment (Moore, 2018).
**Aggressor.** An individual or group of people who initiate a hostile action toward another person, creating a verbal or physical conflict that may result in emotional intimidation, physical injury, or death (Bauman & Campbell, 2018).

**Bullying.** A form of aggressive behavior from an individual or group whose intent is to hurt or harm another person resulting from power, dominance, and intimidation. This form of power exists when targets are attacked verbally, physically, emotionally, or socially (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011).

**Bystander.** A person who observes a hostile event and possesses information about an individual’s repeated destructive behavior, such as witnessing physical aggression toward another person, hearing threats made by the aggressor, or possessing screenshot evidence of online threats or harassment (Patchin, 2016).

**Cyberbullying.** Inflammatory communication by individuals through electronic means, such as posting threatening or embarrassing messages that may be vulgar or harmful to the victim’s image or emotions (Burns, 2012; Feinberg & Robey, 2009; Gable et al., 2011; Schell, 2016).

**Harassment.** Devious acts or unwanted actions of an individual or group, including threats, demands, and blackmail (Patchin, 2015).

**School Counselor.** A member of an education administrative team who assists students in achieving their academic goals and future career development (Midgett, 2016).

**Social Media.** A collection of websites and applications dedicated to community input that enable users to communicate, share information, participate in social chat groups, and engage in digital networking (Patchin, 2015).
**Target.** A person or object selected as the focus of a specific verbal or physical attack (Slonje & Smith, 2008).

**Victim.** A person attacked by another person, resulting in an unpleasant event (Bauman, Cross, & Walker, 2012).

**Delimitations**

This study was delimited to high school assistant principals and school counselors employed at schools located in Orange County and Riverside County in southern California.

**Organization of the Study**

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters. Chapter I provided the introduction and background regarding cyberbullying and the study. Chapter II presents a literature review covering the evolution of cyberbullying, the adverse effects of cyberbullying, and current policies regarding the prevention and consequences of cyberbullying. Chapter III highlights the methodology used in the study. Chapter IV presents analysis of data and findings. Finally, Chapter V provides a summary, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for future study.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A product of cultural change and social climate, bullying has remained a significant issue throughout the last century (Olweus, 2013). Bullying through digital technology, known as cyberbullying, made the issue of bullying difficult to define because of the elusive dynamics of cyberspace (Donegan, 2012). Each day, schoolchildren learn valuable skills and lessons from their teachers as well as through interactions with their peers. Although school is undoubtedly beneficial to America’s youth, some school experiences, such as bullying, may negatively affect children for the rest of their lives.

Children find an outlet for their frustrations through bullying others (Donegan, 2012). In the past, these actions could be better controlled because of the limited nature of physical interactions and face-to-face communications between students. However, this conflict evolved with digital technology, making it difficult for the average person to keep up. Abuse becomes cyberbullying when cell phones, social media sites, and other forms of technology allow bullying to expand into cyberspace (Donegan, 2012).

Children today have a wide variety of technologies at their disposal. Smartphone technology is a primary means of communication and interaction with one another (Carter, 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Smartphone technology utilizes the internet as a platform for interactive communication and social networking; however, using technology for hostile communications creates a negative connection impacting victims in such destructive ways it caught the attention of the news media, school officials, parents, and members of local communities (Horakh, 2012). Regardless of the involvement of hostile acts that occur beyond school grounds, cyberbullying is a
disruptive behavior prompting physical retaliation between the bully and victim, often resulting in physical and emotional injury. Currently, no widely accepted strategies exist to effectively deal with cyberbullying due to lack of research on the topic (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; Pittaro, 2018).

This literature review highlights the effects of cyberbullying and its negative impact on high school children. It begins by discussing the history of bullying and emergence of cyberbullying, cyberbullying on social media, and the impact and effects of cyberbullying. The theoretical foundations of bullying are then presented, encompassing dominance theory, theory of humiliation, and organizational culture theory. The theoretical framework of the study and emergence of cyberbullying laws and policies are discussed next. In addition to cyberbullying prevention strategies, subsections present existing research focused on the effectiveness of prevention strategies and exploration of other methods for cyberbullying prevention. Finally, the literature review examines high school assistant principals and counselors and their roles, referral of students to external agencies, student welfare and learning committees, evaluation and improvement of current counseling programs, and ethical and professional standards.

**History of Bullying**

The origin of the word *bully* dates to the Dutch in the mid-16th century (Harper, 2008). The word transcended from the word *Boele*, which was used as a form of address to a male friend or a term of endearment to a lover. Since the mid-16th century, usage of the word bully transitioned from the male friend and term of endearment to a negative character label that emerged in the 17th century. The negative label of bully became more defined between the 18th and 20th centuries because of physical face-to-face fights on
school grounds and intimidation techniques when children were in groups (Olweus, 1993).

Bullying was a common physical and psychological presence throughout the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, where it occurred on school grounds, in local neighborhoods, and at times, within families. During this period, aggressive behavior in the form of bullying was part of growing up and considered harmless and innocent (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Koo, 2007). Although bullying was a combination of acts of mischief among students, in schools it was viewed as a rite of passage or acceptance into a group of children, much like hazing is viewed in fraternities and sororities today (Da Silva, Farhangmehr, & Jalali, 2018). In August 1862, one of the first incidents of death as a result of bullying involved a boy killed at King’s Boarding School in the United Kingdom from bullying behaviors demonstrated by the schools’ upperclassmen; no charges were brought against the upperclassmen because school leadership viewed the incident as normal behavior among teens in the boarding school (Koo, 2007; Olweus, 1993).

Bullying did not become a focal point of concern until 1862, when Times of London reported the death of a soldier due to bullying (Koo, 2007). This account was the first article to address the possibility bullying could result in death. Many people during that time did not view bullying as harmful or dangerous. The article described how the soldier died as a result of retaliating against one of the officers after systemic torment and continued bullying. As the years went on, and the issues of bullying became more prevalent, the topic of bullying received more attention from psychological researchers (Koo, 2007).
Olweus (1993) conducted an initial study on bullying utilizing students and systematic research methods. Olweus’ (1993) research focused on two specific goals: establishing a structure of accountability among student and teacher interventions and abolishing bullying among students. As a result of his study, Olweus (1993) created the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP), which showed promising results in reducing school bullying. Olweus made an enormous impact on school leadership, encouraging leaders to restructure policies to combat bullying within the school culture.

Bullying can cause immediate adverse effects on children, and its stigma can last for many years. Olweus (1993) emphasized the lack of teacher interventions for bullying incidents, concluding supervision by teachers, staff, and administrators was essential to diminishing such incidents. Active intervention strategies must be implemented by the school leadership, administrators, and parents to reduce bullying behavior (Home & Orpinas, 2004).

In the culture of the 21st century, the word bully in its most basic sense involves two people: a bully and a victim. Bullying is pervasive and can happen anywhere in society. It happens in homes, communities, organizations, and within local, state, and federal governments. At a minimum, bullying is a dyadic process supporting rejection, disapproval, and other characteristics. The bully initiates abuse of the victim through direct physical actions, indirect verbal communications, or other means of attack to establish a sense of emotional dominance and control. Bullying assaults involving another person take many forms, including expressions of bigotry, hazing, sexual harassment, threats of harm to reputation, and threats to integrity (Allanson et al., 2015). Examples of direct actions include physical hitting, face-to-face verbal assaults, targeting,
and outing. Indirect actions include rumors, gossip, sexting, flaming, excluding, and posting private messages in the general population of social media (Donegan, 2012). Thus, bullying is inherently a social process that must be understood from a social-psychological perspective (O’Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999).

**School Violence**

In addition to cyberbullying, school violence increased at an alarming rate. During the first six months of 2018, 12 different shooting incidents were reported at high schools throughout the country (Ahmed & Walker, 2018). Examples of 2018 high school shootings involved Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida; Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas; and Great Mills High School in Lexington Park, Maryland. Catastrophic school shooting events can stem from bullying issues not resolved adequately in earlier years, often transitioning from middle school to high school environments (McMahon, Strachila, & Weatherby, 2010). A surprising 75% of school shootings have some link to harassment or being bullied at school (Loveless, 2019), and 87% of students surveyed between the ages of 12 through 18 believed bullying was the primary motivator of school shootings (National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice Statistics; as cited in Loveless, 2019). Loveless (2019) noted little documentation addressing the issues these students faced from the beginning of their bullying experience in elementary school; most relevant information was recorded by a school administrator but not reported to the police. This suggests unresolved bullying follows students into upper grades.
Bullying in Schools

To decrease the prevalence of bullying among students and adults, school policies were modified to hold bullies accountable for their actions and support administrative staff in taking action to discipline and punish the offender (Olweus, 1994). While trying to ensure the safety of the school environment against bullying, school safety laws were linked to federal and state funding via the No Child Left Behind Act (Edmondson & Zeman, 2011). Specific state laws were modified to increase accountability measures for acts of cyberbullying both on and off campus. As laws continued to change, society continued to evolve, implementing new school policies as bullying became more challenging to track with the prevalence of social media. For example, high school safety measures included placing scanners at the entrance of a school to check students for weapons, but similar preventative measures are more difficult for cyberbullying. Federal and state agencies attempted to respond to the increased use of social media by teens with updates of harassment laws, school laws, and policies to counter bullying and hold bullies accountable for their actions in cyberspace.

Bullying is a negative form of behavior, sometimes leading to physical violence on school grounds or in the classroom, that affects both students and teachers (Rivara & Le Menestrel, 2017). Outbursts and suicides are among the destructive behaviors linked to victims of traditional school bullying (Li & Shi, 2015). Physical bullying on school grounds and in the classroom has occurred for generations, but the act of bullying via cyberspace is a more recent phenomenon. Historically, bullying was considered part of growing up or building character that conditioned children for the harsh realities of the world (Rankin & Shah, 2008). These conditions changed constantly along with societal
norms and perceptions. As a result, counselors, teachers, and school administrators who rely on their certifications in conflict resolution and mediation may inadvertently send a distorted message to victims who experience bullying (Stopbullying.gov).

Although many opportunities currently exist to bully others on school campuses, smartphones and other digital technologies amplify destructive behaviors. Most children exposed to bullying are being bullied by peer groups or others seeking power and influence. Harassment tends to increase through the teenage years and may occur in the classrooms, hallways, and any unsupervised periods (Loveless, 2019). As bullying transitioned to the digital space, it became a significant threat to the emotional health of students. In all, cyberbullying and other forms of harassment negatively impact children and disrupt their confidence (Nixon, 2014).

With the expansion of the internet and use of smartphones, young people have increased access to private messaging and message boards. As a result, cyberbullying expanded to involve peers, neighbors, and strangers through the increased use of personal computers, smartphone technology, and the internet. By communicating under anonymous profiles on social media, cyberbullies have a perfect cover to intimidate or harass others without much accountability.

The Emergence of Cyberbullying

As mobile technology evolved, online bullying increased (Thomson Reuters, 2013). The advance of the internet and development of chat rooms and online forums provided a communal breeding ground for youth to bully or harass one another (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Chat rooms were supplanted by AOL Instant Messenger (AIM), an online communication program that allowed teens to spend hours
talking to one another in private, one-on-one conversations or in public and group-specific chat rooms. From AOL various social media platforms emerged.

Communication through social networking sites, email, and texting are dominant methods of transmission in today’s culture (Berson, Berson, & Ferron, 2002). With the continued development of smartphone technology and software applications, a dynamic shift from the traditional face-to-face bullying platform to electronic bullying emerged. Teenagers and young adults depend on their phones and other communication tools, which allow streamlined access to social media sites (Frisén et al., 2013). Socializing through the internet using smartphone technology allows an individual to remain mobile and communicate with others without physically being in their presence (Mason, 2008). The use of these devices dramatically increased since 2003, allowing communication mischief on the internet with anonymity making perpetrators irresponsible (Willard, 2007). Although social networking sites are popular with adolescents, users are not held accountable for their rudeness and inflammatory language.

Over the last 25 years, the expansion of communication technologies reached across the globe, connecting 2.32 billion people and changing how people communicate (Live Internet Stats, 2016). From 2010 to 2016, smartphone usage increased from 62.6 million to 224.3 million people (Live Internet Stats, 2016). In 2016, 88.5% of the U.S. population had access to the internet with 324,118,787 million users. Computer and smartphone use enhanced social behavior by amplifying the ability to communicate with others outside the local community (Berson et al., 2002; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Computers and smartphones also facilitate entertainment through music and movie applications. For example, applications such as WhatsApp, Marco Polo, Skype,
Instagram, Twitter, Facebook Messenger, and Facetime allow individuals to reach a mass audience to facilitate and promote a cause. Although electronic devices transformed the communication platform, they also present a profound risk of misuse (Beran & Li, 2005; Brighi et al., 2012).

Advances in smartphone software resulted in a transformation from traditional face-to-face bullying to cyberbullying, where communication is more psychological than physical. New software such as Google Duo and Facetime enables adolescents to harass others without accountability or record. Although physical presence is not a factor in cyberbullying, cyberbullies dominate their victims by exploiting sensitive information to induce humiliation (Beran & Li, 2005). With increased access to social media, cyberbullying is prevalent in American culture due to the difficulty of imposing consequences for misbehavior without violating citizens’ First Amendment rights (Bossler et al., 2015).

People have many ways to communicate without speaking face-to-face. Although some try to conform to social norms, others feel the rules are too restrictive and want to step outside the box (Mapes, 2008). In the absence of negative consequences, cyberbullies continue to engage in mischievous behavior (Mapes, 2008). The anonymity of cyberbullying impacts victims of all ages, including many who may not stand up for themselves (Carvalho et al., 2008). Meanwhile, most teenagers are immersed in an online environment for innocent purposes: to keep up with the latest fashion trends, sports information, or gossip about their favorite actors (J. Anderson & Rainie, 2012).

A study by Slonje and Smith (2008) surveyed adolescents who experienced cyberbullying and found that 50% of subjects did not tell anyone, 35.7% told a friend,
8.9% told a parent or guardian, and 5.4% told someone else. One reason for not reporting cyberbullying incidents was fear parents might confiscate their phones or restrict their internet privileges (Cohen-Almagor, 2018). Many victims did not tell adults, nor did they go into detail about their experiences related to cyberbullying (Brown, Cassidy, & Jackson, 2006).

M. Anderson, Lenhart, and Smith (2015) stated the rates of digitally abusive behaviors from current or former relationships range from 8% to 31%. These abusive behaviors are measured by both perpetration and victimization of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse (Rothman et al., 2011 as cited in Blachman-Demner et al., 2015). The top three abusive behaviors are reading text messages without permission (21%), saying mean things on the internet or via a mobile phone (22%), and consistently calling multiple times during the day (31%). Additionally, Hinduja and Patchin (2017) conducted a nationwide study of 5,707 teenagers between ages 12 and 17 and found 33.8% experienced cyberbullying, 22.5% observed nasty comments about them, 20% experienced rumors, 12.2% received online threats, 10.3% experienced their identity being compromised online by someone else, and 7.1% experienced the creation of webpages using their images with the intent to embarrass or tarnish their reputations.

Cyberbullying on Social Media

Cyberbullying Behaviors

Social media is currently the most popular platform for social interaction and communication (Duffett, 2017). Cyberbullying supports destructive behavior both online and off. The average person spends a minimum of two hours at a time on social media, where there is a 30% risk of individuals demonstrating negative behavior (Duffett, 2017).
Cyberbullies prefer to use social media sites and instant message platforms to spread rumors to display some form of power and dominance (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). The literature identified 10 common types of cyberbullying behavior:

1. **Flaming.** Flaming is the sending of angry online messages with vulgar content, which could be an attempt by the perpetrator to secure the victim’s attention (Alias et al., 2017).

2. **Online harassment.** Online harassment involves sending repetitive, offensive messages through texts and social media outlets to induce aggravation and fear for the victim’s safety. Online harassment also includes targeting and trolling through alternate profiles superficial in nature (Donnerstein et al., 2017).

3. **Masquerading.** Masquerading is using another person’s online identity to destroy their reputation. This term is often used in discussions regarding the suicide of Megan Meier who was bullied online by a friend’s mother using a fake online profile; as there was no active federal law holding the perpetrator accountable, she was only charged with the misuse of a computer (Sung, 2018).

4. **Trickery.** Trickery is the act of deceiving someone to acquire sensitive and personal information, then sharing it with a large audience. This behavior is also known as phishing or spoofing, in which the unknown victim is sent to a false website and sensitive information is collected (Bauman & Campbell, 2018).
5. **Denigration.** Denigration is the act of unfairly criticizing someone or representing them as lacking in value or importance. Denigration includes the texting or posting of defamatory information about someone or starting a rumor damaging to the person’s reputation and lifestyle (Bauman & Campbell, 2018).

6. **Outing.** Outing is the act—intentional or otherwise—of revealing details of an individual’s private life without that individual’s explicit consent. Outing can be connected to people associated with an LGBTQ group and who risk being seriously injured. Outing includes sharing intimate secrets about someone in an online forum, including explicit pictures, private documents, and videos (Beran & Li, 2007).

7. **Cyberstalking/Targeting.** Cyberstalking/targeting is a term for continuous harassment, following, spying, and threats of physical harm under the protection of anonymity. Cyberstalking is a practice that can be psychologically damaging to people who consistently use the internet (Ford & Gordon, 2006).

8. **Social Exclusion.** Social exclusion is the act of intentionally leaving someone out of group activities including instant messages, social networking sites, or other online group activities.

9. **Trolling.** Trolling refers to using insults or inflammatory language on social networking sites and message boards as a deliberate act of provocation. Trolling may also describe pursuing or continuing an inflammatory
conversation by directing the issue to the individual’s personal messenger on a social media site and using intolerable language (Hardaker, 2010).

10. **Sexting**: Sexting is a term for the dissemination, forwarding, or transmittal of sexually explicit messages, images, and photos between electronic devices. When it is nonconsensual, sexting is identified as both sexual harassment and sexual assault (Mitchell & Ybarra, 2014).

**Personal Values**

Personal values are social principles, goals, and standards members of a culture believe have intrinsic worth (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006; as cited in Thomas, 2013). Personal values are important because they serve as guiding principles in people’s lives and influence human behavior to determine how an individual should behave or act (Thomas, 2013). Values enable people to make ethical decisions in line with their standards. One of the challenges counselors face in maintaining and applying their values is keeping up with rapidly changing technology. Hinduja and Patchin (2012) contended that teens explore new challenges that add value to increase self-esteem and to seek revenge on others who make them feel uncomfortable. Brown et al. (2006) observed issues regarding cyberbullying complicated an individual’s exercise of his or her First Amendment rights.

**Motives**

Motives are reasons for doing something, including reasons that may not be obvious. Motives are an important component of bullying because they are why people harass others. Motives, along with values, change when society changes drastically.
Gordon (2017) stated changes in computer and smartphone technology streamlined access to social media sites where victims may experience cyber threats.

Gordon (2017) found cyber threats often sprung from motives such as revenge, peer pressure, boredom, anonymity, and power. This information aligned with the study’s framework of choice theory outlining the basic needs of humans, power being one of the basic needs to be satisfied (Glasser, 1999). The need for power is often translated to cyberbullying behaviors (Craven et al., 2012). Gordon (2017) detailed victims of bullying who harass others online have one motive: to retaliate against their perpetrators. Unlike perpetrators who may have a variety of motives for online harassment, victims want to find a way for their perpetrators to experience being a victim and believe they are justified in their actions (Gordon, 2017). As such, several authors identified high-impact motives for cyberbullying and a strong motivation for its victims to retaliate and feel justified in doing so (Esin, 2017; Gordon, 2017). Once victims retaliated, they ultimately prepared for any backlash (Gordon, 2017).

Social Media

Social media was a significant contributor to the rise of cyberbullying in the past decade (Garett, Lord, & Young, 2016). Esin (2017) found between 2003 and 2007, the popularity of social media increased as it became more streamlined with new ways to communicate and share information. With the increased use of social media as a preferred method of communication, it became an easy and convenient way to bully others (Bossler et al., 2015; Carter, 2015).

Carter (2015) acknowledged the history of the internet and reviewed the initial reason for its existence. Internet communication and social media were not intended to
judge a person’s behavior, but to develop a supportive environment to increase mobility. However, the anonymity of the internet opened the door for negative and hateful interactions (Carter, 2015). As such, aside from increased access and convenience, other factors in cyberbullying include the internet’s flexibility, allowing users to anonymously harass unsuspecting victims and achieve psychological dominance (Bosslor et al., 2015). Through factors of convenience, ease of access, and anonymity associated with the internet, cyberbullies achieved their need for dominance over their victims by exploitation of sensitive information to induce humiliation (Beran & Li, 2005).

**The Impact and Effects of Cyberbullying**

Several research studies argued cyberbullying has become a severe problem, affecting the performance of students and employees in any environment (Banks, 1997; Nansel et al., 2001). Victims of cyberbullying may experience depression, anxiety, paranoia, anger, and isolation, as well as decreased academic performance and increased thoughts of suicide (Crosslin & Golman, 2014; Fremouw et al., 2013; Mitchell, 2017). In addition to these negative consequences, cyberbullying impacted people of all demographic categories, striking wherever victims are perceived as weak and unable to stand up for themselves (Carvalho et al., 2008). In attempts to address cyberbullying in schools, several districts established policies regarding the appropriate use of school technology; however, school counselors and administrators cannot regulate the behavior of perpetrators off campus (Smahel & Subrahmanyam, 2011). As such, when instances of cyberbullying are not swiftly handled, the cycle of cyberbullying continues, and often the victim stops reporting the problem although it remains (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).
underscores the need for school counselors and administrators to establish and take intervention measures to protect students and prevent future cyberbullying.

Several studies explored the negative psychological effects of cyberbullying on an individual level (Beran & Li, 2005; Crosslin & Golman, 2014; Fremouw et al., 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Hinduja and Patchin (2008) identified cyberbullying as the catalyst for some outbursts linked to emotional, behavioral, and mental health issues. Such issues were linked to feelings of anxiety, sadness, embarrassment, and depression, which were commonly identified among victims of cyberbullying (Beran & Li, 2005; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Ybarra, Mitchell, Finkelhor, and Wolak (2007) outlined the same findings, stating targets of cyberbullying experienced depression after being harassed extensively online. These negative psychological consequences led victims to experience issues with truancy, anger, and isolation (Crosslin & Golman, 2014; Fremouw et al., 2013).

**Suicides**

Going deeper into the mental and psychological consequences experienced by victims, Balutbangan, Mamazandi, and Najafi (2017) conducted a study examining the relationship of stress, anxiety, and depression to suicidal ideation in adolescents via the mediating factor of victimization of bullying. They found self-harm and victimization through bullying were associated with emotional distress such as feelings of sadness, hopelessness, anxiety, and stress, factors which significantly increased suicidal thoughts in adolescents. Another finding of the study indicated anxiety, stress, and depression have a direct effect on victimization (Balutbangan et al., 2017). This was consistent with Fekkes et al. (2006) who concluded victims of bullying were more prone to
psychosomatic and psychosocial problems during school-aged years, wherein issues such as anxiety, stress, and depression increased suicidal tendencies.

In several high-profile suicides of adolescents reported in the news media over the last decade, cyberbullying was described as influencing adverse outcomes among pre-teens and teenagers (Peebles, 2014), including victims who experienced anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation (Fremouw et al., 2013). Cyberbullying affects more victims than traditional bullying (Brown et al., 2006). Victims are consistently perusing the internet through their smartphones, tablets, or computers, which leaves them vulnerable to harassment. Cyberbullying is a worldwide problem, including the risk of suicidal ideation and attempts among teens and young adults who encounter fake profiles of perpetrators (Marr & Field, 2001; Tracy, 2017). One high-profile case occurred in 2007, when 13-year-old Megan Meier committed suicide after her friend’s mother created a fake online profile to harass her. The mother was charged with four counts of unauthorized computer access under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act by a federal grand jury but was later acquitted due to a lack of specific federal laws concerning cyberbullying (Zetter, 2009). Meier’s case prompted lawmakers in her home state of Missouri to pass a bill defining cyberbullying and updating the state’s harassment law.

**Social Exclusion**

Social exclusion is a complex form of discrimination where people are denied resources, goods and services, and the ability to participate in the social life of their community based on ethnicity, social class, gender, or religion (Levitas et al., 2007). Social exclusion is the experience of being isolated from activities involving a group or individual to which one does not belong. Social exclusion identifies the economic
systems connecting the quality of life of different individuals (Mack, 2016). It is a process illuminating discriminatory factors of relationship power balances, including those at hierarchical levels that continue to impede rights and access to proper resources (Allen et al., 2012). Social exclusion is relevant for this study because it demonstrates prejudice from characters of different social classes and how victims of this discrimination are affected. Social exclusion impacts the mindset of current social groups and their choices of whom to associate with and allow to participate within their cliques (Mack, 2016). Social exclusion processes are prevalent in social networks of high socio-economic status.

**Victim Mentality**

Victim mentality is a mindset maintained by individuals with low self-esteem, a negative mindset, and an external locus of control (Goens, 2017). Those who display victim mentality do not accept responsibility for their actions, living in a world where only black-and-white perceptions exist, nor do they maintain deep friendships or professional work associations. Victim mentality is a learned behavior supported by a dysfunctional mindset to blame others for their shortcomings and to avoid being held accountable for their own decisions. This mindset is a strategy to maintain a safe space and avoid leaving one’s comfort zone (Goens, 2017).

According to Mann (2010), victims of cyberbullying can have lasting emotional, concentration, and behavioral issues. These problems may bleed into their social lives as they encounter trouble getting along with others. Duverge (2015) stated students may experience trust issues after bullying events and are more likely to abuse alcohol or drugs at an earlier age. Victims of cyberbullying can develop dangerous stigmas and
experience harmful shame from their peers. Victims of cyberbullying create strategies to manipulate others as a defense mechanism. Despite not being threatened physically, victims of cyberbullying still suffer from physiological symptoms. Cyberbullying victims report frequent headaches and stomach pain often associated with nervousness. They may also turn to self-harm, including cutting their skin with razor blades (Duverge, 2015).

These traumatic experiences may continue through life, forcing victims to experience negative environments and negative thoughts (Kaufmann, 2011). The victim mentality also describes the victim’s belief his or her life is more painful than other’s lives. These individuals make everyone else miserable because their own lives lack prosperity. Dealing with these types of individuals can breed toxic relationships out of envy, jealousy, and competitiveness (Kaufmann, 2011).

**Target Audience**

Cyberbullying is more prevalent than traditional bullying (Peebles, 2014). Traditional bullying is generally limited to school and home areas, whereas victims of cyberbullying are reached anywhere and the target audience is vast (Peebles, 2014). Cyberbullies target the most vulnerable audiences by implementing 10 common types of cyberbullying behavior (Nixon, 2014). Traditional bullying, in contrast, can more easily be identified by counselors, teachers, and administrators as the enforcers of school policy.

A recent national survey of youth reported the average age of a teenager involved in cyberbullying is 15 (Prevent Cyberbullying, n.d.). Prevent Cyberbullying (n.d.) stated boys and girls between the ages of 12-14 will more than likely become targets of online harassment. Additionally, females are more likely to be targets of opportunity than boys.
(Nixon, 2014). Images, online posts, and messages can be instantly shared across smartphones, and it quickly becomes difficult to control who may possess copies of sensitive information. As a result of being selected as victims of cyberbullying, teens begin to experience low self-esteem, antisocial behavior, and a false sense of belonging, and may fear for their personal safety at school (Nixon, 2014). For example, if a person is consistently teased about their weight or physical appearance, the victim may make attempts to change their appearance to counter bullying experiences (Gordon, 2018).

**Theoretical Foundations of Bullying**

Bullying is a complicated social dynamic better understood by applying various theoretical frameworks (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). This section provides the theoretical foundation on bullying, with a focus on social dominance theory, humiliation theory, and organizational culture theory. These platforms are used to better understand what motivates bullying behavior among students, its adverse effects on unsuspecting student victims, and how school culture and environmental dynamics play a role in the prevalence of bullying.

Theoretical foundations explain ideas connecting a specific subject. Ideas are elements of the study that serve as a reference in an investigation. Theoretical foundations serve as a guide for the researcher from the beginning of the study to its conclusion (Vinz, 2015). A good theoretical foundation helps find answers to research questions and thus benefits the research, allowing for quality work (Vinz, 2015). Thus, construction of a good theoretical foundation is necessary to conduct a literature review related to the subject and design a scheme the researcher will follow (Cline, 2017).
Social Dominance Theory

Social dominance theory is defined as a distinct group of hierarchical economic systems providing access to a different set of privileges within a social group (Levin et al., 2006). Social groups contain three identifying components linked to a social cycle: age, gender, and arbitrary (Pratto & Walker, 2004). Age dominance is a system where adults naturally display a powerbase over children, whereas gender dominance is another system where men and women possess unequal amounts of power and political influence (Levin et al., 2006). Arbitrary groups are identified and defined by distinct classes of culture, including nationality, ethnicity, social class, and religious views (Levin et al., 2006).

Social dominance theory specifies the act of amplifying the character of prejudice and discrimination of different platforms concerning social status (Pratto & Walker, 2004). These forms of discrimination include personal predispositions of individuals, institutional practices, the interaction between men and women, and ethical policies (Levin et al., 2006). Differences according to social status and variance illuminating intergroup perceptions may display alternative perceptions with lasting effects. In addition, power differences display levels of discrimination, especially if the patterns of belief are either different from the rest of the group or not in agreement with a higher authority (Levin et al., 2006).

Finally, social dominance theory initializes a sense of belonging for different members of dominant subordinate groups where acceptance is validated by peers and holds a high status of prestige and power. Discrimination is characterized as an existing trait where it is displayed when Whites are against Blacks, men against women, and
adults against children, who cannot distinguish between the other types of ethnic groups (Levin et al., 2006). Therefore, social dominance theory is based on gender, age, and membership in other groups, separating them into distinct social classes and categories (Levin et al., 2006).

**Humiliation Theory**

Humiliation theory describes the emotional act of being exposed and reacting to humiliation and psychological attacks by individuals with power and influence or within a small local community (Leask, 2013). Humiliation is a negative psychological experience a student or adult encounters. Much focus is given to peer-to-peer humiliation where bullying occurs, especially in the school environment. McCauley (2017) defined humiliation as a combination of anger and shame, emotions associated with a lack of psychological preparation for intense emotional experiences or a missed opportunity to retaliate for humiliation.

Humiliation involves the experience of heightened emotions initiating a reaction of negative thoughts and feelings (McCauley, 2017). Reports by victims describe the acts of power on the part of the perpetrator, including reflecting on their own failures to react appropriately. Reactions experienced by victims of bullying and cyberbullying include nausea, psychological confusion, withdrawal, social avoidance, devaluation, and dishonor (McCauley, 2017).

**Organizational Culture Theory**

Organizational culture theory is a structure of shared values and beliefs according to intergroup dynamics and the challenges and opportunities facing any organization (Miner, 2007). Thought processes concerning shared beliefs provide a perceptive lens
through which the world can be viewed from the education system. The logic, order, and
thought process by which people perceive their level of understanding is key to how they
see and express themselves (Schein, 2004). Both intercultural and intergroup dynamics
formulate group thinking guiding the behavior of counselors, teachers, and administrators
according to their organizations’ policies and ethical outlines. Workplace behavior
within the organizational culture tends to influence interactions between employees,
management, and executives (Miner, 2007; Schein, 2004).

In all, organizational culture theory describes significant functions of the
workplace, including strategic leadership, organizational management, business
development, and codes of conduct between employees and executives (Schein, 2004).
Implementation of ethics, organizational standards, and work policies within an
organizational culture provide employees with a sense of direction in accomplishing tasks
and professional goals. Where a strong organizational culture exists, people either buy
into the norms or become discouraged and leave to pursue other endeavors (Alvesson,
2002). When the organizational culture ultimately enables employees to see a significant
return on investment, then they are motivated to stay with the organization because their
purpose is being fulfilled.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Theoretical frameworks examine a topic through a perspective lens where many
other lenses—such as organizational theories, social learning theories, emotional
intelligence, and psychological theories—may be used to define concepts to explain a
meaning of existence (Creswell, 2012). Frequently, these types of frameworks may come
from outside of an organization or academic major. Using a theoretical framework helps
analyze past events by asking a specific set of questions when examining a topic (Creswell, 2012). The theoretical frameworks guiding this study are social disorganization theory (Bruinsma & Johnson, 2018) and choice theory (Craven et al., 2012).

**Social Disorganization Theory**

Social disorganization theory is defined as a state of current social norms, characterized by the cultural breakdown of effective social control resulting in a lack of functional social intergroups, conflicting personalities, and personal attitude maladjustment (Sharma, 2016). Disorganization theory of personal attitudes and maladjustment could be a learned behavior within economically deprived and socially disorganized environments ultimately considered disenfranchised. Social institutions such as schools and churches are unable to regulate the behavior of neighborhood youth under these circumstances because they provide only weak social control and community leadership (Sampson, 1986). Therefore, disenfranchised areas with a high rate of juvenile delinquency and environmental influence are prone to violent crime (Sampson, Morenoff & Earls, 1999).

Social disorganization theory spotlights deviant behaviors that often occur in social environments and institutions (Triplett, 2018). Environments where most community members support one another are considered cohesive neighborhoods and display the components of social control (Sampson et al., 1997). Social control is demonstrated by key members of the local community either familiar with an individual’s family history or are in some way related. Communities are more apt to come together in a collective effort to intervene and deter violence and crime in areas where social
disorganization influences delinquency (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls (1997). Without cooperation or intervention by local residents, then intervention is unlikely and trust is nonexistent within the community (Sampson et al., 1997).

Studies of social disorganization indicated it is an important predictor of youth violence and crime by affecting several mediating processes facilitating youth violence (Cullen & Pratt, 2005; Deutelman et al., 1990; Polk, 1957; Sampson, 1986). Research on youth violence and crime also indicated practitioners need to consider the links between economic deprivation and social disorganization when attempting to explain the genesis of youth violence. In attempts to attenuate youth violence, several policy implications such as social ecology, influence of peers, and community cohesion are suggested by social disorganization theory (Cullen & Pratt, 2005; Deutelman et al., 1990; Polk, 1957; Sampson, 1986).

The concept of social disorganization originated with William Thomas (1927, 1966). Social disorganization theory was originally used as a framework to identify the negative effects of rapid changes in the population composition of high-density social groups (Thomas, 1966). Several other scholars furthered the research on social disorganization theory with the goal of finding empirical explanations for individual problematic behaviors while researching such changes within the population composition at a macro level in different societies (Boggs, 1965; Burgess & Bogue, 1964; Chilton, 1964; Lander, 1954; Reckless, 1940; Sutherland, 1937; Sweetser, 1970; Weisburd et al., 2009). Aside from rapid changes in population settings and composition, social disorganization theory was used in the context of rapid technological changes as social media aggression arose and established itself as the new style of bullying (Austin &
Jordan, 2012; Donegan, 2015; Li & Fung, 2012). Thus, researchers like Austin and Jordan began to study the traumatic effects of cyberbullying and used social disorganization theory as a framework to underscore rapid changes in technology as disrupting the norms of the average user. Social disorganization theory focuses on laws, policies, and the role of the school as it pertains to cyberbullying (Austin & Jordan, 2012).

The focus of cyberbullying at the school level aligns with the need for partnerships among certified school counselors, administrators, and parents. Furthermore, social disorganization theory identifies cyberbullying as an emerging issue in the field of education because it is a disruption to student learning (Austin & Jordan, 2012). With the framework of social disorganization theory as a point as reference, school administrators, counselors, and faculty members can better identify negative behaviors or patterns indicative of cyberbullying to address its direct effects (Austin & Jordan, 2012; Donegan, 2015). This framework acts as a guide to determining through behavioral cues where and when cyberbullying is likely to occur to better equip school administrators, counselors, and faculty members to prevent cyberbullying through proactive measures and preventive programs.

**Choice Theory**

According to Glasser (1999), choice theory is a psychological model explaining why people behave in certain ways and how people can build positive relationships within their surroundings. Craven et al. (2012) underlined choice theory as the ability of someone to control his or her behaviors by choosing when and how to implement emotions concerning aggressive acts from others. Glasser (1999) argued the real source
of problems is the individual’s own choice; that is, behaviors are directed by internal variables, not external factors. This approach was utilized and considered an instrumental view of politics because it brings out the logic and limits of the approach (Elster & Hylland, 1986). This form of external psychological control pits individuals against one another as they use influence to manipulate other individuals to do their bidding (Glasser, 1999). As such, choice theory operationalizes components of cyberbullying, including manipulation and pitting people against one another.

Vandebosch and Cleemput (2008) observed victims of bullying tried to balance their sense of inadequacy with cyberbullying behaviors, seeking power via the knowledge attained from the internet and other electronic communications.

Similarly, Glasser (1999) defined power as one of the five basic needs originating from human intrinsic nature, namely safety and survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun. As a result of choice theory, although the basic needs of humans are similar, the ways in which these needs are attained differ due to varying environments, lives, upbringing, and cultures. Because choice theory rests on the belief all human behavior is chosen, it defines those choices to satisfy the five basic needs (Glasser, 1999).

Cyberbullying was analyzed as a need-based behavior from the viewpoint of choice theory in this study. The use of choice theory enabled the analysis and assessment of cyberbullying behaviors to be used for preventive and intervention programs. Choice theory served as a foundation for to explain human behaviors in the context of cyberbullying and to understand the perception of cyberbullying in schools given the policies and other environmental factors present in that context.
Cyberbullying Laws and Policies

Federal Laws

Federal laws were created by the U.S. government to delegate decisive authority to states. These laws allow states to retain or exercise their limited powers, resulting in two or more levels of government within an established territory or region. Therefore, federal and state laws work together in unison while reserving limited powers to the state government.

The adverse effects of cyberbullying demonstrate a need to re-evaluate federal laws to prevent this form of harassment in schools and the workplace (Banks, 1997). Currently, no federal laws or regulations specifically address cyberbullying (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Federally, anti-bullying laws only cover harassment based on protected classes such as race, age, sex, religion, and disability. In those instances, the federal government could intervene in resolving bullying issues (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). The challenge in restricting cyberbullying via federal laws stems from the constitutional right to free speech in the First Amendment. A proposed bill by lawmakers to regulate cyberbullying could be a potential infringement upon a person’s first amendment rights.

California State Laws

California laws related to cyberbullying are limited to education. California Education Code 48900 Part (O) and series 48900 1-9 reference cyberbullying and internet harassment. Although cyberbullying laws are limited to education, some California laws that address both traditional bullying and cyberbullying. For example, California Penal Code § 653.2 covers the intent to cause other people to fear for their safety and the safety
of their family via the use of electronic communication devices (Tran, 2009). Actions included in this law are posting photos without the other person’s knowledge to cause injury and harassment by an external party. Both imprisonment and a fine can punish those found guilty under this law. The outline of this law emphasizes electronic devices being used for malicious communication with the intent of harming, tormenting, or terrorizing an individual, including through social media (Tran, 2009).

Assembly Bill 86 2008 Code §32261 was passed and signed into law in September 2008. This law focuses on student safety and allows school officials to recommend the suspension or expulsion of a student on the grounds of traditional bullying, cyberbullying, or any act involving a digital device and posts on social media websites (Lieu, Salas, & Solorio, 2008). Assembly Bill 86 was designed to prevent intimidation, threats, disorder, or acts that create a hostile environment (Lieu et al., 2008). Additionally, existing law prior to 2008 prevented suspension or expulsion until the principal could determine whether the student committed a malicious act violating the school safety plan and standing policies. This new bill allowed school administrators to suspend or expel students for bullying, cyberbullying, or any other malicious acts involving digital devices (Lieu et al., 2008).

Senate Bill 719 (Bullying Prevention for School Safety and Crime Reduction Act of 2003) required the California Department of Education (CDE) develop school safety plans covering grades K-12 (Havice, McLeod, Pacheco, & Strom-Martin, 2001). The plans are meant to maintain and address compliance issues with current state laws and school policies. This law also required developing child abuse reporting procedures. The
safety plans and child abuse reporting procedures were meant to reduce crime in schools
and within the cyberspace community (Havice et al., 2001).

Assembly Bill 746 Chapter 72 was passed and signed into law in July 2011. Chapter 72 highlighted the language in the law regarding student behavior on social networking sites (Campos, 2011). Any acts of bullying, sexual harassment, intimidation, or hate crimes against school personnel or students can be punished under the Interagency School Safety Demonstration Act of 1985 (Campos, 2011). Acts within the parameters of this law include cyberbullying and any form of electronic communication device.

Assembly Bill 9 Chapter 723 was passed and signed into law in October 2011. The law amended Sections 234. (1-5) of the education code requiring an investigation into student suicides. The law was named after Seth Walsh, a 13-year-old who committed suicide after being harassed extensively for his sexual orientation (Ammiano & Yamada, 2011; Kehoe et al., 2011). This bill required a state-mandated program to ensure schools adhere to its changes and that the California Superintendent of Education consistently updates the state website to provide information about resources for victims of harassment and bullying. The law required school districts to prohibit any form of discrimination or intimidation based on characteristics like sexual orientation (Ammiano & Yamada, 2011; Kehoe et al., 2011).

Assembly Bill 256 Chapter 700 was passed and signed into law in October 2013. The law identifies the role of education leaders in intervening in bullying cases occurring off school grounds (Garcia, 2013). It also specifies the creation or transmission of inflammatory language violates the electronic act. This law enabled administrators to
take appropriate action regarding cyberbullying and defined the electronic act for expelling students for bullying or cyberbullying acts (Garcia, 2013).

Assembly Bill 1542 Chapter 668 was passed and signed into law in October 2017. Known as Jordan’s Law, it authorizes the court to consider the act of willfully recording a violent felony in the state of California as a violent felony itself (Dababneh, 2017). The intent was to encourage or facilitate the offense in aggravation or prolonged harassment. California penal code 667.95 allows the court the discretion to consider punishment under the title aggravation and hold individuals accountable for their actions in cyberspace and on social media (Dababneh, 2017).

School Policies

Aside from federal and state laws created to address the issue of bullying and cyberbullying, several school districts made efforts to tackle the issue, such as the establishment of cyberbullying school policies (Espelage & Hong, 2017; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). Schools progressively acknowledged the weight of the issue as cyberbullying became a high-interest topic. Threats initiating violence are more common with the spread of social media, online stalking, and other forms of harassment.

With the objective of understanding current cyberbullying policies in schools and their effectiveness, Espelage and Hong (2017) examined prevention efforts in other countries. They reviewed teacher and administrator perceptions of cyberbullying to identify whether this was a significant issue in their schools. They found cyberbullying was an issue in their schools in terms of development and perception of how often it occurs. However, the authors also found school administrators lacked ability and readiness to respond effectively. Educators agreed cyberbullying was a toxic issue, but
they were not effectively trained on how to combat students engaged in cyberbullying or to initiate proactive measures. Additionally, Espelage and Hong (2017) found administrator efforts were further hampered by seemingly random changes in the law, resulting in constant revisions to school policies outlining cyberbullying protocols.

With continuous changes in policies, Espelage and Hong (2017) concluded neither educators nor school administrators implemented a clear language of cyberbullying with respect to school protocols and standing policies. This constant change and lack of clarity resulted in ill-defined protocols and unmet needs for training among counselors, teachers, and administrators (Espelage & Hong, 2017; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). This body of findings provides empirical context underlining the lack of school policies and protocols needed to address cyberbullying in schools. Other studies also reviewed existing school policies, analyzed the occurrence of cyberbullying, and explored various ways to address the issue (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; Smith et al., 2008).

As cyberbullying takes place online, one of the options considered to eliminate cyberbullying in school districts was to completely ban the use of electronic devices and the internet (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). However, this option was found unsustainable and infeasible (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; Smith et al., 2008).

Hoping to address the issue of cyberbullying, Hinduja and Patchin (2009) recommended secondary schools take a proactive approach by updating policies to include parent counseling on the potential effects of cyberbullying. Other researchers explored prevention programs to understand and address cyberbullying in schools and reviewed the effectiveness of such programs. However, several authors found prevention programs were continuously under development (Espelage & Hong, 2017; Frisén, Slonje,
Most prevention programs were ineffective because educators could not effectively monitor student behaviors. Seeking to address this lack of monitoring, Frisén et al. (2013) concluded school policies must be updated to reflect current laws and schools must educate students, counselors, teachers, and administrators on cyberbullying consequences, including its effects on student behavior.

Kowalski et al. (2012) inquired further into the topic of current laws on cyberbullying and recommended the following intervention strategies: record and save the evidence, report the perpetrator to the school administrator, seek legal advice, investigate the cyberbullying incident, and report the incident to both parents and law enforcement. In addition to this recommendation, Kowalski et al. (2012) noted the changes in laws regarding cyberbullying make safety obligations challenging to implement in the school system. Top leaders in education may be required to establish a safety committee specifically to keep up with the constant changes impeding student success (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). To address this challenge, Hinduja and Patchin (2007) recommended the revision of school safety plans and that counselors, teachers, and administrators work to gain the trust of students to prevent online harassment and increase student safety. This method allowed educators and school leaders to provide a safe environment for students and to communicate their concerns while remaining transparent and understanding (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). Through the increase of transparency and understanding, schools implementing this program received more reports from victims of cyberbullying, suggesting these schools gained their students’ confidence and students were more willing to report such acts (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007).
Researchers also investigated the topic of parent roles in addressing cyberbullying (Burbidge et al., 2017; Moore, 2018). Burbidge et al. (2017) found a widening generation gap due to the lack of technical training and digital information adults received about cyberbullying. Although students are reluctant to inform their parents of cyberbullying incidents, it is in the best interest of the parents to become current with today’s digital technologies and their destructive potential for students (Moore, 2018).

Parents must take the initiative to monitor their child’s use of social media and address cyberbullying (Espelage & Hong, 2017). Moore (2018) underscored the need for administrators to streamline the investigative process and document all results of investigations. Repetitive language in school and district policies attempts to automatically initiate a ban on cyberbullying behavior without first implementing an investigative protocol. Without an investigative process, this component is counterproductive. School administrators and education leaders who have not reviewed their behavioral policies have not implemented consequences aligned with the nature of cyberbullying or online harassment (Brackett, Martin, Palacios, & Swearer, 2017).

School Responses to Cyberbullying

As education administrators become more aware of cyberbullying and its effects on students, leaders are attempting to develop a plan to encourage students to report incidents of cyberbullying. School leaders rarely suspend or expel students for cyberbullying because school policies focus on traditional bullying and harassment on school grounds. Suspension or expulsion is a decisive measure when protecting the victim from the aggressor, and it is up to school leaders to ensure the safety of students. As school administrators struggle to keep up with the dynamics of cyberbullying and its
effects on students, many districts lack an investigative process to hold perpetrators accountable for electronic violations (Wiseman, 2011). Supportive actions could include immediately reacting to the student’s complaint and initiating an investigation to show leadership is taking the issue seriously (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

**Reporting Cyberbullying**

Most research on the reporting of cyberbullying focuses on why students fail to report to school personnel. One in three U.S. children report bullying incidents at school, whereas one in seven report online bullying (Alexander & Krans, 2016). One reason students are less inclined to report cyberbullying incidents is they attempt to handle the issue on their own (Cassidy et al., 2009; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Other students may fear school officials physically securing their mobile devices (Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007). In a study by Juvonen and Gross (2008), 90% of students did not report the details of their victimization to an adult or tell their parents about cyberbullying incidents. Students did not inform their parents of cyberbullying incidents due to fears their parents would confiscate their mobile devices, and students expressed a lack of confidence in their teachers claiming school leaders would make the cyberbullying situation worse (Agatston et al., 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Among younger students, reporting cyberbullying incidents tended to have a positive impact on establishing trust with school leaders, adults, and parental support. Hinduja and Patchin (2009) discovered younger students were more willing than older ones to report cyberbullying to school officials. Although younger students who witnessed cyberbullying acts were more likely to report the issue than the victim (Cassidy et al., 2009), the 12- to 16-year-old age range was where parental intervention focused on
phones and social media (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Additionally, cyberbullying became the focus of research when studies began indicating students experienced cyberbullying at a higher rate than physical bullying. Students who report cyberbullying incidents tend to possess confidence and support in their relationships with their parents.

**Role of High School Assistant Principals**

High school assistant principals serve the vital purpose of supporting the principal with discipline and other issues so the principal may focus on more important duties (Sun, 2018). High school assistant principals perform many roles during their daily activities, ranging from disciplinarian to operations manager of the school, and they collaborate with parents, teachers, and administrators to ensure the academic success of students. High school assistant principals are charged with providing administrative support for teachers and overseeing the welfare of students (Sun, 2018). This means high school assistant principals focus on strategies and provide professional development to help teachers achieve their goals while working to ensure students are in class and able to learn.

The position of high school assistant principal is viewed as a steppingstone to the role of principal (Sun, 2018). High school assistant principals work to safeguard student rights and provide needed services by collaborating with members of the local community, local law enforcement, and community mental health agencies. High school assistant principals also promote equity and access to a safe learning environment to improve the educational experience. Essentially, high school assistant principals are mentors for teachers, other administrative staff, and students to produce a healthy and
positive school climate for student learning. Sun (2018) noted the following characteristics were common among high school assistant principals:

- Strong organizational skills
- Attention to detail
- A desire to help students succeed
- Trustworthy
- Diplomatic
- Effective in communications
- Familiar with technology
- A desire to be active and visible

The multifaceted role of a high school assistant principal presents a daily challenge; high school assistant principals are required to consult with teachers and parents on student progress and, in some cases, address high-risk behavioral issues such as drug use, emotional breakdowns, suicide, violence, arrest, or running away (Haskins, 2012). High-risk students who demonstrate life-threatening behavioral issues are often referred to external agencies because these problems may exceed the high school assistant principal’s level of training. Additionally, high school assistant principals provide discipline, counseling, and mentorship to students to offer structure and guidance that assist students with developing organizational skills to support their academic and personal lives (Haskins, 2012).

High school assistant principals must possess an administrative credential or certification to perform the duties assigned. Current state laws require high school assistant principals to report incidents of neglect, child abuse, and physical altercations
between students, parents, teachers, or other adults to local law enforcement and child protective services. These additional responsibilities require the high school assistant principals to interface and work with numerous outside agencies.

**Role of High School Counselors**

High school counselors serve the vital purpose of providing social, emotional, and academic support to students (Haskins, 2012). High school counselors provide support for structured career guidance and support student emotional and social development, which helps them become responsible and productive citizens (Haskins, 2012). The counselor role is to advocate for students and collaborate with teachers, administrators, and other support providers to ensure student success. Counselors focus on strategies assisting students to achieve academic goals.

While collaborating with other stakeholders to promote student achievement, school counselors support a safe learning environment and work to safeguard the rights of all members of the school community. Incorporating leadership, collaboration, and advocacy, school counselors promote equity and access to learning opportunities and provide counseling to improve the educational experiences for all students (Billingsley, Connally, DeMatthews, & McLeskey, 2018). Schools with effective counselors and counseling programs often see positive results among students who participate in such programs (Dahir & Stone, 2016). Moreover, school counselors address the needs of all students through prevention and intervention programs as part of a comprehensive school counseling program. These programs provide additional benefits such as:

- Reduced test anxiety among students
- Increased confidence and self-esteem
• Reduced number of dropouts
• Fewer classroom disturbances and outbursts
• Students with higher expectations of themselves
• Improved grades
• Improved social skills
• Reduced incidents in bullying and antisocial behavior

Counselling Students

The life of a high school student is full of intense challenges in a time of increased stress due to fear of failure, tougher academic challenges, social pressure, an uncertain future, and concerns about college or work and being financially independent (Johnson, 2012). High school is a time where students face life-altering transitions disrupting their expectations and comfort zones. High school forces students to take on leadership roles that challenge them to make good decisions for the welfare of themselves and others. New high school students often look for acceptance by other students and peer groups and, to a large degree, rely on their peers to learn what types of behaviors are acceptable and discouraged.

A school counselor’s primary duty is to directly counsel students on their achievement of academic goals and assist them with their career aspirations. Additionally, school counselors provide group counseling to students for improved relationships with peers and assist with development of organizational skills that support their personal lives. Although school counselors receive formal training and certification to perform the counseling duties assigned, the job of a school counselor has become daunting due to extreme caseloads and high numbers of referrals from classroom teachers.
(Irvin et al., 2004). The multifaceted role of a school counselor is a daily challenge as they try to assist students with academic, social, and emotional support.

High school counselors are required to consult with teachers and parents on student progress and, in some cases, address high-risk behavioral issues such as drug use, emotional breakdowns, suicide, violence, arrest, or running away (Haskins, 2012). It is a position demanding expertise in psychology, counseling methods, and career guidance. The drawback to this position is that it can become overwhelming as they attempt to serve a minimum of 400 students as part of their caseload (Haskins, 2012).

Some school counselors deal with student issues daily, with some problems so severe they require a referral to a social worker or school psychologist (Barona & Santos de Barona, 2006). High-risk students who demonstrate life-threatening behavioral issues are often referred to external agencies because these problems exceed the counselor’s level of training and available time. For example, students who present a danger to themselves or others are referred to outside specialists who provide psychological services. Current state laws require school counselors to report incidents of neglect, child abuse, and physical altercations between students, parents, teachers, or other adults to local law enforcement and child protective services. These additional responsibilities require the counselor to interface and work with numerous outside agencies.

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the literature pertinent to both physical bullying and cyberbullying, identifying face-to-face interactions, expanded smartphone technology, social media, and social dynamics impacting students in a high school setting and in peer social groups (Carter, 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; Levin et al., 2006; Miner, 2007;
Schein, 2004). The literature also highlighted the challenges lawmakers, high school assistant principals, high school counselors, and teachers encounter daily concerning emotional and psychological effects displayed by the victims of bullying (Crosslin & Golman, 2014; Fremouw et al., 2013; Mitchell, 2017). High school assistant principals and high school counselors cannot regulate off-campus behavior; however, suicides and magnified systemic issues can be addressed by restructuring school policies identifying boundaries and ethics (Smahel & Subrahmanyam, 2011). Despite a generation gap between adults and children concerning mobile and computer technology, there is a need to update anti-bullying programs to deter bullying incidents both online and offline, including victimization and retaliation experienced by high school students (Berson et al., 2002; Burbidge et al., 2017; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). The analysis of this literature suggested a change in school policies and state regulations needs to happen to hold parents, teachers, and administrators accountable for bullying resolutions (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). It is necessary to focus on the issues associated with students who experience lasting effects from bullying issues and to examine how high school assistant principals and high school counselors can provide additional support to curb suicidal ideation and physical conflicts.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Chapter III describes the methodology used to conduct this study. This qualitative study examined high school assistant principal and high school counselor perceptions of students bullying and cyberbullying. The study followed methods established by McMillan and Schumacher (2010), Patten (2012), and Patton (2015) for qualitative research. The purpose statement and research questions are restated, and the rationale for selecting the methodology is described in greater detail. The chapter then provides an in-depth description of the research design and procedures for data collection and analysis, including a discussion of the population, sample, and study limitations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the perceptions of high school assistant principals and high school counselors regarding the impact cyberbullying has on students in southern California. The study also sought to identify strategies and prevention programs essential to counteracting cyberbullying, as perceived by high school assistant principals and high school counselors.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do high school assistant principals and high school counselors describe cyberbullying in California high schools?
2. What do high school assistant principals and high school counselors perceive as the impact of cyberbullying on high school students?
3. What do high school assistant principals and high school counselors perceive as strategies essential to counteract the effects of cyberbullying on students?
Research Design

Qualitative methods typically include gathering data through interviews, observations, and review of documentation (Silverman, 2016). Qualitative researchers analyze data and form judgments about the major and minor themes expressed by participants. In qualitative studies, findings are often shared through rich and detailed narrative descriptions, opposed to the numbers and statistics characteristic of quantitative studies (Lewis, 2015). Basic qualitative research focuses on how meanings are constructed and aims to uncover and interpret those meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The advantage of a generic qualitative approach is researchers do not have to strictly qualify or align the study with the requirements of other qualitative designs, such as grounded theory, phenomenology, and case study (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). However, one of the disadvantages of a general qualitative inquiry is the use of general data analysis procedures that may be used in other qualitative research designs (Percy et al., 2015).

General qualitative inquiry research is appropriate for this study because the research questions of the study cannot be entirely addressed with one specific research design. The researcher explored a phenomenon by obtaining firsthand information from individuals with authentic experiences and perceptions about the topic of the study. Moreover, through general qualitative inquiry, the researcher could develop a comprehensive insight into the behaviors and experiences of high school counselors and administrators concerning cyberbullying.

Other qualitative designs considered for this study were: grounded theory, case study, phenomenology, and narrative inquiry. The grounded theory approach examines
data across multiple sources to generate a theory explaining a phenomenon (Patton, 2015). The intent of this research does not include exploring opinions and developing a theory about cyberbullying was not the intent of this study; therefore, grounded theory was not appropriate for this study.

A qualitative case study is used when exploring perceptions of individuals from a single group or organization, known as a case, about a phenomenon (Yin, 2017). However, the researcher for this study could not explore and focus on the perceptions of counselors alone. Instead, there was a need for more comprehensive data collection procedures from counselors and assistant principals about perceptions, behaviors, and experiences to address the research questions thoroughly. Therefore, a case study was not the most appropriate design.

A phenomenological approach involves exploring the lived experiences of a group of people who experienced the same phenomenon, such as observing changes in social dynamics, leadership positions, or job responsibilities (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological approach was not selected because the researcher did not focus on the lived experiences of participants alone. Instead, participants were asked about their perceptions of how cyberbullying affects students and their ideas to help combat cyberbullying. As such, phenomenology was not an appropriate design.

Another option explored was a narrative inquiry, which involves collecting and presenting data in chronological order to address the questions of a study (Clandinin, 2016). However, the order of occurrence of events was not significant in addressing the research questions of this study. Therefore, a narrative inquiry method was not chosen.
The general descriptive approach was found to be most appropriate for gathering data to capture the perceptions of this group. The participants had direct experience with the phenomena and were in good positions to address the research questions. For these reasons, general qualitative research was the most appropriate method to identify and describe the perceptions of high school assistant principals and counselors.

**Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as a data collection instrument by being an observer for this study (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Kaplan, Chen, & Carriere, 2017). The role of the researcher includes recruiting participants, collecting data, analyzing data, and interpreting the findings. During recruitment of participants, the researcher intended to personally initiate contact and invite participants for the study, which could create a conflict of interest (Engward & Davis, 2015). The researcher intended to address potential conflicts of interest issue by refraining from recruiting friends, family members, relatives, and colleagues. The researcher also allowed participants the chance to read and review an informed-consent form before deciding whether to join the study.

During the data collection stage for this study, the researcher personally gathered data from participants. The researcher acted as the primary data collection instrument by serving as the interviewer (Kaplan et al., 2017; Nelson, London, & Strobel, 2015). The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to collect data about the perceptions of high school assistant principals and counselors regarding social media as related to cyberbullying. The researcher was also responsible for developing the interview guide for this study. Because the interview guide was researcher-developed, the researcher used an expert panel to review the interview guide for clarity and bias to ensure it was
valid prior to data collection. With a valid data collection instrument, the researcher
could avoid asking irrelevant or leading questions when interviewing participants. After
data collection, another role of the researcher was to transcribe and analyze each
interview. To ensure the coding was valid, an expert researcher was used to double-code
a portion of the data to check for inter-rater reliability.

**Population**

A population is a group of individuals who conform to specific criteria and
common characteristics (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The population for this study
was high school counselors and assistant principals in California. Currently, there are
1,339 traditional public high schools and 259 public charter high schools in California
(CDE, n.d.). This number excluded alternative, religious, and private high schools that
were not a focus of this study. The total number of school counselors employed across
the California in 2017 was estimated at 4,794 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).
The total number of assistant principals employed across California in 2017 was
estimated at 4,736 (CDE, 2017).

**Target Population**

It is typically not feasible to study large groups due to time and cost constraints;
therefore, the researcher chose a target population from within the larger group. A target
population is the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which
data are to be used to make inferences; the target population defines the population to
which the findings should be applicable (Etikan et al., 2016).

The target population identified was high school assistant principals and
counselors in Orange and Riverside Counties in southern California. These counties
were chosen due to proximity to the researcher. Orange County has 28 districts operating a total of more than 60 high schools and Riverside County has 23 districts operating more than 80 high schools total. Thus, the target population was the approximately 140 high schools serving students in grades 9-12 operating in Orange and Riverside Counties.

**Sample**

Patton (2015) defined a sample as a subset of the target population representing the whole population. Sampling is used because of the ability to identify themes from a smaller group representative of the larger population (Barratt, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015). It would be impossible to collect data from all high school assistant principals and counselors in California, so a sample was used. Purposive sampling was used for this study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique commonly used for recruiting participants of qualitative studies (Etikan et al., 2016). Purposeful sampling as a technique used to select meaningful participants with relevant and detailed information to contribute to a study (Barratt et al., 2015). Therefore, the participants recruited were most likely to provide relevant information for the study given their background and experience with the study topic. The researcher used purposive sampling to recruit information-rich participants able to thoroughly address the research questions.

With purposive sampling, the researcher identified participants using a set of eligibility criteria. The sample for this qualitative study included high school assistant principals and school counselors from Orange and Riverside Counties with training and experience in dealing with cyberbullying issues. Only those who set themselves apart from their peers by displaying four or more of the following characteristics were selected:
- Evidence of successful relationships with students
- Five or more years’ experience at the high school level
- Participated in specialized training regarding cyberbullying
- Presented at a professional conference on cyberbullying
- Published an article or paper related to cyberbullying
- Held membership in a professional organization related to his/her field
- Helped develop policies or strategies to address cyberbullying

The sample for this study was six high school assistant principals and six high school counselors. The sample size for this study was based on a data saturation point suggested by Fusch and Ness (2015): the point of data saturation is reached when (a) no more new information can be identified; (b) no new codes can be classified; and (c) no new themes emerged. A sample size of 10 to 30 is usually enough to reach data saturation (Boddy, 2016; Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). The researcher recruited 12 eligible participants.

**Instrumentation**

The researcher used a qualitative instrument by creating interview questions to conduct this study. Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews with high school assistant principals and counselors for more in-depth responses regarding professional experiences related to cyberbullying. These interviews allowed participants to respond about their perceptions of cyberbullying in California high schools.

Qualitative research has five common methods for collecting data: “interviews, observations, questionnaires, document reviews, and audiovisual materials” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 343). For this study, face-to-face interviews were conducted and
the researcher asked participants to share appropriate artifacts such as district policy documents, professional development resources, and meeting agendas in support of strategies to manage cyberbullying issues at the high school. The researcher developed a semi-structured interview guide with a set of open-ended questions designed to gather data about participant perceptions regarding cyberbullying.

Interview questions were aligned with the purpose and research questions of the study. These questions were developed to provoke thought and stimulate creative solutions from the participating high school assistant principals and counselors. The foundation of the questions in the interview guide came from the literature review matrix (Appendix A). After the completion of the literature review, a general interview protocol was designed for this research (Appendix B). The researcher used semi-structured interview questions to find any similarities among participant answers.

It is crucial to establish face validity concerning the credibility of an instrument to improve or redesign questions (Patton, 2015). Upon completion of the draft interview protocol for this research, the list of questions was submitted to an expert panel to review the content and language of the questions and identify any issues before field testing.

**Expert Panel**

An expert panel was selected to examine the quality of interview questions, to critique the protocol, and to provide feedback on the alignment to the study purpose. Selection of the expert panel members was contingent on their meeting the following criteria:

- Subject matter expert in instrument development
- Experienced in data collection and external resources
- Five or more years of experience in performing in-depth and semi-structured interviews
- Experience as a high school assistant principal or school counselor

Each panel member received an emailed copy of the purpose statement and research questions for this study, and a copy of the interview questions to solicit their feedback. Based on the results of the panel’s critique, items not aligned with the purpose of the research were restructured. Additionally, if questions were deemed misleading or not within the line of logic, those interview questions were revised. Once feedback and changes were made as a result of the panel’s critique, the instrument was move forward to the field test.

Field Testing

Before conducting the interviews, a field test was conducted to solicit feedback on the construction of the interview questions and the structured format of the process. Field tests are used to solicit input on the wording of the questions and value of the content. This effort was implemented to ensure the validity and clarity of the questions before the actual interview. Furthermore, the field test allowed the researcher to implement time management for a successful interview.

During the field test, the researcher interviewed participants in the same face-to-face environment as called for in the research protocol. One high school counselor who met the sample criteria and was not included in the study participated in the field test. This field test allowed the researcher the opportunity to ensure the information on the instrument was comprehensible. Upon the completion of the field test interview, the participant was asked to reflect and provide feedback about the interview questions and process using the Field Test Participant Feedback Questions (Appendix C).
Validity

Content validity describes the situation in which the researcher depends upon the proper construction of the instruments to ensure the elements adequately measure the variable of interest (Patton, 2015). A study must have content validity to ensure interpretations are accurate so conclusions can be drawn based on data collected. In the context of this study, with the researcher as the primary instrument, validity depends mostly on the competence and skill of the researcher. The researcher addressed this limitation in part by the following steps:

1. The researcher performed a mock interview with a subject who met the sample criteria but was not a participant in the study. An audio recording of the mock interview was made. The researcher employed a volunteer observer knowledgeable about interviewing skills. The audio tape and observer notes were reviewed for feedback concerning delivery, pacing, and interview techniques. This process helped validate that the interview skills of the researcher were appropriate.

2. Before conducting interviews, the researcher developed and refined the interview questions through an iterative process with an observer, a survey development expert, the faculty panel, and peer researchers. This process helped ensure interview questions asked what was needed to address the research questions. This process helped validate the interview guide.

Reliability

According to Patton (2015), reliability in qualitative research refers to “an instrument that consistently measures something from one degree to another” (p. 151).
Cox and Cox (2008) described reliability as developing an instrument consistent over time, whereby if similar studies were repeated, results would be similar. In qualitative research, reliability refers to the consistency and repeatability of the research procedures (Yin, 2007). Literature suggested when a study achieves consistency in its data collection, analysis, and results, then it is reliable (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2015). To increase reliability, the researcher utilized the same interview guide and procedures with each participant, ensuring all participants were asked the same questions.

Trustworthiness is the qualitative counterpart of validity and reliability in quantitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To improve trustworthiness, the researcher observed the following elements: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To improve credibility, the researcher reflected on the truth of the data and participant views, and the researcher used an expert review of the data collection instruments. The researcher performed a field test with a volunteer with traits similar to those of the intended participants. This process helped to validate the appropriateness of the interview skills of the researcher and the interview questions. The researcher also conducted member checking to improve the credibility of the study.

The researcher addressed transferability by ensuring future researchers and readers could easily replicate the study to evaluate the applicability of the results to another setting. To improve transferability, the researcher provided a discussion of the procedures and findings of the study in a detailed manner. With the detailed discussion of procedures and data, others can easily replicate the study to other settings.

The researcher improved dependability through an audit trail. An audit trail includes detailed documentation of the processes and outputs relevant to a study.
(Connelly, 2016). The researcher compiled documents (e.g., consent forms, interview
guide, transcripts, notes) to allow readers and future researchers to assess the
appropriateness of the procedures for the study.

The researcher improved confirmability by minimizing the subjectivity of the
study. By using an expert-reviewed data collection instrument, the researcher minimized
the possible influences concerning personal bias of the study. The researcher also
acknowledged possible sources of personal biases to minimize the subjectivity of the
study, thus improving its credibility.

**Data Collection**

Prior to participant recruitment and data collection, the researcher obtained
permission to conduct the study from the Brandman University Institutional Review
Board (BUIRB). The BUIRB is responsible for reviewing all research projects involving
humans. The BUIRB approves research describing professional ethics and standards.
After receiving approval from the BUIRB, the researcher contacted potential high schools
to seek permission to conduct research.

High schools were selected based on their diversity of student population and
proximity to the researcher. A Google Maps search was conducted to identify schools
within a 50-mile radius of the researcher’s location. The dissertation committee provided
support to the researcher in identifying schools as candidates to participate in the study.
The researcher followed up with contacts provided by the committee to receive
permission to conduct the study from each district superintendent. The researcher sent
emails to each of the contacts.
Once the researcher received approval from the superintendent, a search began for high school assistant principals and school counselors to participate in the study. Administrators were asked to identify high school assistant principals and school counselors who met the study criteria. When administrators identified eligible assistant principals and school counselors, the researcher sent them invitations to participate in the study (Appendix D). High school assistant principals and school counselors who agreed to participate in the interview were given an informed consent form (Appendix E) and a date, time, and location were set for the interview.

At the time of the interview, the researcher collected the signed informed consent form and provided the participant a copy of the Brandman University’s Research Participant’s Bill of Rights (Appendix F). Participants were reminded of the nature of the study and informed their responses would be kept confidential. Also, participants were informed the interview would be recorded and transcribed to ensure information accuracy. As such, participants were asked to sign an audio release form (Appendix G).

The same interview questions were used for all participating high school assistant principals and counselors to ensure consistency throughout the process. Once an initial response was given to an interview question, the researcher followed up with additional questions to further examine the reactions and observe any form of personal bias. After the interview concluded, the researcher offered the high school assistant principals and school counselors the opportunity to provide any additional remarks or artifacts for the study. The researcher thanked the participants for their time and participation in the research.
The researcher conducted member checking as a follow-up to each interview. Member checking is a process enabling the researcher to improve data accuracy and correctness (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016; Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017). Each participant received a copy of his or her interview transcript through email and had seven days to review the content and give feedback about the accuracy and correctness of the information. Participants contacted the researcher within seven days to discuss any inconsistencies and clarify information. The researcher made minor changes to the data based on discussion with the participant.

**Data Analysis**

According to Patton (2015), qualitative data focuses more on understanding individuals who share a characteristic. In qualitative data analysis, information must display common patterns across interviews to identify emerging themes. The data analysis process began with transcription of the audio recordings. All conversations with the selected high school assistant principals and high school counselors were recorded and transcribed by Temi transcription software. After transcription of the audio recordings, the researcher replayed the audio recording while reading the transcript to confirm their accuracy. This review was also used to identify initial themes.

Using NVivo coding software, codes were applied to segment of text aligned to each research question to assist in highlighting commonality of data. The use of NVivo allowed the researcher to identify and code keywords and statements from the interviews. A recursive process was used to validate repetitive data within the categories. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated recursive analysis is also called constant comparison, in which the researcher frequently searches for data supporting emerging themes in the
study. Once the data were coded, the researcher was able to highlight the common themes that emerged from the data. Coding also allowed the researcher to identify the common perspectives between all high school assistant principals and school counselors interviewed and their responsibility concerning students, social media, and efforts to resolve cyberbullying.

According to Patton (2015), inter-coder reliability refers to the extent to which two or more independent coders agree on the coding of the characteristics of the interview or artifacts and reach the same conclusion. An outside researcher double coded 10% of the data to check for inter-coder reliability. The outside researcher was a doctoral candidate who confirmed the themes, trends, and frequency counts of coded data.

**Ethical Procedures**

A researcher must address ethical issues when using human subjects for a study (Makhoul, Chehab, Shaito, & Sibai, 2018). The first ethical procedure implemented was the BUIRB process. In this step, the BUIRB assessed the researcher’s methods and whether the rights of the participants were violated through the study procedures.

Another important ethical consideration is the informed consent process. Participants received an informed consent form before joining the study. Through the informed consent form process, the researcher informed participants of their role and rights, the purpose of the study, and data collection procedures. Only eligible high school assistant principals and school counselors who signed the consent form were considered participants in the study. Additionally, all participants were volunteers. The researcher did not directly or indirectly force any participants to be a respondent of the study.
Participants were not given incentives for participation and participants could opt out of the study at any time without consequences.

Another important ethical issue was confidentiality. The researcher replaced all participant identities with pseudonyms. Moreover, all data collected and used for this study were physically stored in a locked cabinet or in a password-protected external hard drive. All data were kept on file for five years after completing the study. After five years, all the relevant data were destroyed through shredding or permanent deletion.

**Limitations**

All research designs have limitations (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This research was contingent on a convenience sample of participants. The high schools selected were chosen based on their proximity to the researcher. Thus, the sample was limited by geographical location and the fact all participants were affiliated with high schools. As such, the findings may not generalize to other regions in California or other educational levels (i.e., elementary or middle school).

Another limitation was the small sample size. Due to time and financial constraints, only 12 participants were interviewed, six assistant principals and six school counselors. The perceptions of those interviewed may not be representative of the population. Thus, the findings may not be generalized beyond these participants.

A third limitation was the use of interviews as the primary data collection method. Despite safeguards, it is possible participants shared inaccurate information, withheld key information, or said what they thought the researcher wanted to hear rather than providing an accurate representation of their perceptions.
Summary

In summary, this chapter outlined the design of the research along with instrumentation, data collection and analysis processes, and study limitations. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the perceptions and experiences of high school assistant principals and high school counselors in California regarding cyberbullying. Using a general qualitative study, the researcher collected data from 12 eligible participants recruited using purposive sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Coding was performed to process the data collected from the participants. In Chapter IV, the researcher elaborates on the study and findings from this qualitative research.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This qualitative study identified and described the perceptions and experiences of high school assistant principals and school counselors in southern California regarding cyberbullying. Data were collected from six high school assistant principals and six high school counselors through face-to-face interviews. This chapter begins with a review of the purpose of the study, the research questions, research methods and data collection procedures, population, and sample. This chapter presents a synthesis of the data collected and findings. Chapter IV concludes with a summary of major elements related to the study’s findings from participant responses.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the perceptions of high school assistant principals and high school counselors regarding the impact cyberbullying has on students in southern California. The study also sought to identify strategies and prevention programs essential to counteracting cyberbullying, as perceived by high school assistant principals and high school counselors.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do high school assistant principals and high school counselors describe cyberbullying in California high schools?
2. What do high school assistant principals and high school counselors perceive as the impact of cyberbullying on high school students?
3. What do high school assistant principals and high school counselors perceive as strategies essential to counteract the effects of cyberbullying on students?
Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

This qualitative study used semi-structured interview questions to identify and describe the behaviors high school assistant principals and school counselors use and the impact cyberbullying has on students in southern California. A qualitative approach was appropriate because it satisfied the research purpose to deepen the understanding of the perceptions of high school assistant principals and school counselors who regularly encounter victims of cyberbullying.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with six high school assistant principals and six high school counselors for a total of 12 participants. An interview script with nine questions was developed by the researcher (Appendix B). The researcher collected demographic information from each participant before the nine interview questions were asked. Each participant was asked the same nine questions, including probing questions to draw out detailed information as needed. The first three interview questions set the conditions for the interview where each participant began to think about the topic of cyberbullying. The next three interview questions focused on the social or emotional effects of cyberbullying. The final three questions were to identify strategies of cyberbullying prevention and intervention programs. Individual face-to-face interviews were coordinated with a time and location convenient for the participant. Each participant confirmed their consent to participate by signing the informed consent and audio release forms. Upon completion of each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed and prepared for coding. Each transcript was coded to produce emerging themes and patterns across interviews.
Population

The population for this study consisted of assistant principals and school counselors at public high schools in California. Currently, there are 1,339 public high schools in California (CDE, n.d.). The total number of high school counselors employed across California during the year 2017 was estimated at 4,794 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The total number of high school assistant principals employed across California during the year 2017 was estimated at 4,736 (CDE, 2017).

It was not feasible, due to time and cost constraints, to study a population that size. As such, a target population was used. The target population for this study was high school assistant principals and counselors in Orange and Riverside Counties. Orange County has 28 districts with more than 60 high schools and Riverside County has 23 districts serving more than 80 high schools. As such, the target population for this study was the assistant principals and school counselors at the 140 high schools in Orange and Riverside Counties.

Sample

It would not be feasible to collect data from all high school assistant principals and counselors from the target population, so purposive sampling was used. The researcher recruited participants could provide relevant information for the study because of their professional experience. To participate in the study, assistant principals and school counselors needed to meet the following criteria:

- Evidence of successful relationships with students
- Five or more years’ experience at the high school level
- Participated in specialized training regarding cyberbullying
Presented at a professional conference on cyberbullying

Published an article or paper related to cyberbullying

Held membership in a professional organization related to his/her field

Helped develop policies or strategies to address cyberbullying

**Demographic Data**

This study included six assistant principals and six school counselors. Of the six assistant principals, four were male and two were female, and five were Caucasian and one was African American. Of the six high school counselors, four were female and two were male, and four were Hispanic and two were Caucasian. The age range of participants was from 30 to 55 years old. Educational backgrounds consisted of 11 with master’s degrees and one who recently completed a doctorate. Table 1 illustrates the demographics and educational experience of each participant.

Table 1

**Participant Demographic Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Years at this School</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>50-55</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>MA</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>50-55</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>H</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>MS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. AA = African American; C = Caucasian; H = Hispanic
The participants represented seven different high schools with varied student enrollment. The smallest school had just over 1,650 students whereas the largest school had more than 2,500 students. Figure 1 presents the number of students enrolled at each of the high schools.

![Student enrollment at each high school.](image)

**Figure 1**. Student enrollment at each high school.

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**

In accordance with the approved methodology, each research question is presented separately. The data were analyzed to produce common themes and categorized to address the three research questions. Individuals from each interview were assigned participant numbers to safeguard their identity and ensure anonymity for participation in the study. Interviews and artifacts were coded for themes by research question. Coding resulted in 15 themes referenced 614 times across the three research questions. Tables were developed to display the results with the frequency of responses for each theme. Based on the data collected and coded, Research Questions 1 produced five themes, Research Questions 2 produced four themes, and Research Question 3 produced six themes.
Findings for Research Question 1

RQ1 asked: How do high school assistant principals and high school counselors describe cyberbullying in southern California high schools? The data resulted in 193 references falling into five different themes as outlined in Table 2. The most prevalent theme, aggressive communication, was mentioned 72 times representing 37.3% of all codes of RQ1. Cyberbullying is underreported had the second highest number of references with 54, representing 28% of the codes. This was followed by social media websites are abused by students who cyberbully, negative impacts and consequences from cyberbullying acts, and lack of face-to-face interactions. The number of times each theme was referenced through interviews and artifacts is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>Interview Frequency</th>
<th>Artifact Frequency</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive communication</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbullying is underreported</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media websites are abused by students who cyberbully</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative impacts and consequences from cyberbullying acts</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of face-to-face interaction</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aggressive communication. Aggressive communication is the act of communicating in a harsh manner that demonstrates insensitivity without consideration of others’ feelings (Bossler et al., 2015). This theme was referenced 72 times from 11 participants and two artifacts. This theme represented 37.3% of the coded responses.
related. Cyberbullying took multiple forms within the research, with aggressive communication being one of the most common (Willard, 2007). When students communicate aggressively through social media, students socially influence and affect each other’s behavior and tend to conform to the social norms of a group.

During the interviews, 11 of 12 participants who spoke to the impact of technology on aggressive communication indicated the use of digital devices provided a convenient means to psychologically harm others. Examples of digital devices include smartphones, computers, and tablets, which allow immediate communication and response between two or more people. One high school counselor explained,

The abuse of social media is to inflate, to disturb, to psychologically and emotionally hurt other people, that is from the school’s point of view. My personal view suggests the way kids are nowadays, they’re trying to let off steam to take it out on others without having the need to confront the person physically.

This aligned with the theme aggressive communication defined in the parent/student handbook. For example, one of the policy excerpts reviewed from the parent/student handbook identified the content of aggressive communication as: “the intent to annoy the victim, contact him/her by means of an electronic communication device and use obscene language or any threat to inflict injury to the victim or his/her property or any member of his/her family.” This definition aligned with the research pertaining to aggressive communication.

Cyberbullying is underreported. The percentage of high school students who experienced cyberbullying in their lifetime nearly doubled (18% to 34%) from 2007-2016.
Rapid increases in internet use provided bullies with new angles for disruptive communication (Brighi et al., 2012). New social groups communicate within specific chat rooms on particular social network sites (Frisén et al., 2013). For that reason, advances in communication technologies create opportunities for aggressive dynamics such as cyberbullying (Brighi et al., 2012). Yet, cyberbullying often goes unreported, a theme referenced 54 times from 12 participants and two artifacts. Cyberbullying is underreported represented 28% of the coded responses.

During the interviews, all 12 participants provided comments and stories about how cyberbullying was underreported. One high school assistant principal explained, “You got the other students that think it’s okay to hide behind a screen and be who they want to be. This means the students have found anonymous sites that mask their IP address.” Students who are victims of cyberbullying encounters usually do not make a report of the incident because of not being able to identify the anonymous perpetrator. Another assistant principal described students posting derogatory information on social media, saying,

We have kids posting photos and making fun of other kids. Kids are distributing information received from someone else to spread word to others in an effort to embarrass a specific person. We observed this example happening in a lot of different ways.

Female students develop anxiety when they experience body shaming as a result of their intimate photos distributed on social media and are embarrassed to acknowledge or make comments related to the posting. Additionally, one high school counselor mentioned anonymous online accounts, sharing, “Students are creating fake online
accounts in order to communicate behind the screen and remain anonymous.” Students were often unable to identify the person responsible for the online harassment toward them. Overall, respondents agreed cyberbullying was underreported because of the inability to identify the online harassers and the embarrassment of being harassed. These factors may stifle investigations by school resource officers and administrators.

**Social media websites are abused by students who cyberbully.** Fake social media profiles are common within cyberspace and related to this theme with students being digitally irresponsible and not adhering to the proper online netiquette. M. Anderson et al. (2015) stated the rates of digitally abusive behaviors from current or former relationships ranged from 8% to 31%. With increased access to social media, different groups could easily target others anonymously, setting the stage for cyberbullying to occur (Bossler et al., 2015).

Abuse of social media sites by cyberbullies was referenced 33 times from 12 participants. This theme represented 17.1% of the coded responses. Social media websites are prevalent among students who use the platform to cyberbully as compared to students who physically bully others and do not use social media. Students who participated in social media website abuse communicated the reasons for their efforts of cyberbullying to high school assistant principals and high school counselors when the incident was investigated. Reasons for social media abuse included revenge, jealousy, provocation, fun, and the freedom to behave mischievously through establishing fake profiles. Fake social media profiles are prevalent in various websites, including dark web communities that allow members to troll and harass unsuspecting users.
During the interviews, all 12 participants provided content related to social media websites being abused by students who cyberbully. One high school assistant principal explained,

There’s been a lot of cases where we receive reports of students being harassed by somebody online or bullied by use of a fake user account. If it’s severe enough, we will take into account that somebody’s emotional and physical health is at stake.

Another high school assistant principal stated,

Examples that come to my mind are when students allow themselves to be filmed or pictured doing questionable things that spread very quickly. With a boyfriend/girlfriend situation, intimate pictures or videos are spread by one or the other individual after a nasty breakup. This would be recognized by the name calling or negative comments posted on social media about a student or negative comments informing them they’re not attractive. Other indicators are making fun of them where it suggests they should not be around anymore. Most of what I have seen, especially at the high school level, has to do more with embarrassing situations that spread via other students.

This statement aligned with the prior research of Bossler et al. (2015) indicating embarrassing situations ultimately posted on social media websites often result after volatile breakups of relationships. Social media websites were often used in an abusive manner to slander others in a public forum by retaliated behavior.
One high school counselor who explained his view of social media website abuse shared, “If they realized the language used online is just as impactful when they say it in person, I believe students would not have the desire to cyberbully. This is the reason why bullying happens more online than in person.” When students hide behind their computer screens, they are unable to have the visual experience of what their actions impose to the victim. The abuse of social media websites is a norm among students because of their perceptive view of the First Amendment right to free speech. In addition to the social norm, social media used in a negative manner to cyberbully displays student abuse of power and the ability to intimidate and terrorize other high school students. The act of intimidation through social media websites members ultimately makes a choice to inflict psychological, social, and emotional stress on victims who were cyberbullied is an abusive form of communication to other users.

**Negative impacts and consequences from cyberbullying acts.** Psychological injuries from verbal and indirect bullying may be difficult to discover (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Moreover, indirect bullying may not leave physical scars, but often creates social and emotional wounds difficult to detect (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). As a result, high school students who consistently commit bullying acts on social media are not mindful of the consequences that result from cyberbullying. The negative impacts and consequences of cyberbullying was referenced 23 times from six participants. This theme represented 11.9% of the coded responses. Consequences of cyberbullying cannot often be seen by others, but parents and teachers may notice a change in behavior including outbursts, agitation, and seclusion.
When people press the send or enter button on a digital device, they automatically give other users in cyberspace access to the information. This act automatically authorizes consent for posting to social media websites. Yet, many students do not understand the permanence of consequences of their online behavior. One high school assistant principal explained,

Students seek a lot of attention for those postings because the information is immediate and in real time. In my opinion, students are not understanding the level of consequences that can be incurred if you post something derogatory on the internet because it stays in cyberspace forever.

One high school counselor explained, “The lack of realities is the result of the person who pampers students and then feel you have a sense of entitlement. That includes the lack of understanding of the consequences that can be administered.” The level of consequences in the past were not properly administered to students because the punishment was never equal to the severity of the crime.

**Lack of face-to-face interaction.** Face-to-face interactions diminished over the years as a result of social media. The technology challenge for decades was how to interact with friends and families across long distances where they rely on digital communication to strengthen relationships (Fuentes, 2018). Having observed the limitations of face-to-face interactions, humans devised means of proffering solutions (Hendricks, 2013). Social media websites make it easy to virtually antagonize others. Furthermore, without repercussions for cyberbullying, the act alone encourages the growth of aggression, incivility, and meanness on social media platforms (Fuentes,
Virtual interactions make face-to-face communication with others more difficult to perform. Today, people prefer to interact virtually because there is less opportunity for confrontation or rejection. Lack of face-to-face interactions was referenced 11 times from eight participants, representing 5.7% of the coded data.

One assistant principal explained, “Rather than having conversations with students face-to-face, I feel like there are days from the past where a note was written and passed around saying something bad about someone.” With the use of social media today, the students tend to communicate electronically before writing a note or speaking to someone directly. Another high school assistant principal stated,

It’s a safe way to talk about somebody without having to confront the individual in person whereas others may not have the courage to say or confront issues face-to-face. Students have no problem posting negativity on social media, and I think our students learn that behavior from some of the adults.

Notes passed around 30 years ago did not have the same effect as today’s digital technology and demonstrated more face-to-face interaction. This former process had a compartmentalized effect whereas today’s digital communication demonstrates an instantaneous process and allows the user to remain distant from any physical communication activity. One high school counselor noted,

It sounds crazy to think about it this way, but a lot of the students and adults are addicted to social media and cell phone use. I feel they are uncomfortable verbalizing things in person they wouldn’t normally say online. One reason is they’re hiding and feel safe using social media and
two, they’re comfortable to communicate negative comments on social media. I say this from observing the results of kids being comfortable with communicating via text, writing, and social media. This allows both kids and adults to separate themselves from physical reality.

Students and some adults are becoming more distant and separate with their level of communication by using cell phones that give instant access to social media. Physical reality becomes less prevalent as more students and adults consistently maintain access to cell phones and social media. As further explained by another high school counselor,

It might not be something that's happening face-to-face at school. It’s an event where everything is taking place behind the scenes where students may not directly communicate with each other at school. These could be the individuals who are actually doing the bullying or being bullied.

Students and adults are consistently on social media as a result of either conducting research, performing homework assignments, or conducting a job search for employment opportunities. Adults, parents, and students demonstrating bullying acts are performing these acts on social media where they feel safe from physical confrontation. These individuals are uncomfortable addressing issues face-to-face where others are easily offended and may display a hostile attitude toward others. Lack of face-to-face interaction with adults, parents, and students becomes more prevalent as new apps are generated for cell phones and social network websites are developed.

Looking across all the themes for RQ1, the most often referenced related to aggressive communications, followed by cyberbullying happens more than reported. These two themes represented approximately two-thirds of all themes for RQ1. Figure 2
depicts the number of themes along with the number of references to each theme for RQ1.

![Figure 2. Number of the themes and frequencies for RQ1.](image)

**Findings for Research Question 2**

RQ2 asked: *What do high school assistant principals and high school counselors perceive as the impact of cyberbullying on high school students?* The data resulted in 165 coded segments. The most prevalent theme, cyberbullying impacts self-esteem and academic performance, had 89 references representing 53.9% of all coded data for RQ2. Female students suffer from embarrassment and frustration had the second highest number of references with 39, representing 23.6% of the coded data. This was followed by cyberbullying may lead to withdrawal from school and heightened anxiety causes students to demonstrate acts of self-harm (Table 3).
Table 3

Themes for Perceived Impact of Cyberbullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>Interview Frequency</th>
<th>Artifact Frequency</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbullying impacts self-esteem and academic performance</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female students suffer from embarrassment and frustration</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbullying may lead to withdrawal from school</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heightened anxiety causes students to demonstrate acts of self-harm</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cyberbullying impacts self-esteem and academic performance.

Cyberbullying impacts people of all ages and types of organizations where victims are perceived as weak and unable to stand up for themselves (Carvalho et al., 2008). Cyberbullying causes psychological, emotional, and behavioral consequences impacting both the victim and bully (Crosslin & Golman, 2014). Cyberbullying leads to depression, anxiety, anger, and isolation from others (Fremouw et al., 2013). Due to the tragic incidents and the problems resulting from cyberbullying with digital technology, high school leadership is focusing their efforts to understand the impact of cyberbullying on students (Washington, 2015). The theme cyberbullying impacts self-esteem and academic performance was referenced 89 times from 11 participants and one artifact. This theme represented 53.9% of the coded responses related to RQ2. One high school assistant principal explained,

When you look at the root of bullying, oftentimes it’s that situation of the whole upper hand and strength in regard to the bully’s power. Victims
tend to be silent because they feel they don’t have the power to say anything. If they reported the issue or said something to an adult, it’s anticipated that the bullying is going to get worse.

This statement aligned with the research of Fremouw (2013) that found the emotional and behavioral impact of cyberbullying affected academic performance. In addition, another high school assistant principal added his comments concerning cyberbullying, saying,

One of the major things that students deal with when they're being harassed is self-esteem issues, feeling of self-worth. When we do a health and wellness assessment on these kids who are getting bullied it is recommended, we suspend kids from posting on social media. Depending on the level of severity, a 5150-mental health assessment check will be conducted where the kid gets assessed and taken to a facility for Emergency Trauma.

Impacts to self-esteem can be detrimental to student psychological development and their ability to function in a social environment. Students who demonstrate a lack of ability of function socially may be at risk of suicidal ideations and ultimately contemplate suicide by verbally expressing their intent. One high school counselor explained furthered this thought by sharing,

I would say it’s not just self-power because some students are afraid to assert themselves in your face. Students have no trouble asserting power over social media. Assertion does provide a little of that sense of power to the social media platform.
Students tend to display a dysfunctional attitude or become agitated and withdrawn when they are not assertive or resilient. When students fear retaliation or shunning from peer groups, their academic performance will ultimately decline from a lack of concentration on their studies. This theme was also found in one artifact that noted cyberbullying has a propensity to influence a student to miss, skip, or drop out of school. Also, students experienced depression and anxiety, sleep difficulties, and decreased academic achievement. Victims of cyberbullying eventually withdraw from friends and family while teachers and administrators observe a drop in the victim’s grades. Cyberbullying makes it difficult for a student to concentrate on academics from fear of future harassment. Ultimately, the student may withdraw from school, friends, family, and other peer groups because of constant teasing and being ridiculed of subjects sensitive in nature.

**Female high school students suffer from embarrassment and frustration.**

Female students who consistently experience harassment and body shaming are prone to low self-esteem, withdrawal from their friends, and suffer from embarrassment and frustration; these feelings can become internalized and result in conflicted behaviors consistent with direct bullying (Brubacher et al., 2009). Students who internalize their feelings believe they can control their life without any influential factors (Kato & Suzuki, 2018). Recent events regarding cyberbullying highlighted the negative outcomes on its victims, including anxiety, depression, and suicide (Fremouw et al., 2013). This aligned with the finding female high school students suffer from embarrassment and frustration, which was referenced 39 times from 12 participants representing 23.6% of coded data for RQ2. One high school assistant principal explained,
Most of what I have seen at the high school level has to do more with embarrassing situations for students. Embarrassing information is spread from one student to another student and it can be embarrassing and frustrating. Your personal businesses being disseminated, or even other individuals’ business is illuminated.

Students can become extremely frustrated and embarrassed when their personal business is disseminated to other students without their permission. Correspondingly, another high school assistant principal stated, “You might have one student who is not in as much direct communication that would classify as cyberbullying. However, the kids are extensively getting body shamed and seeing messages that support the act of other students.” Body shaming is one of the main components of embarrassment and frustration of female high school students and can lead to chronic depressive symptoms.

One high school counselor explained,

I will stress the importance to the students that once you get a career, your email username and/or address should be something more professional.

I’ve stressed the issue of passing nude photos and pornographic images. If you’re consistently distributing nude photos, that’s considered distribution of child pornography.

If students are caught with nude photos and pornographic images on their cell phones, they can be legally charged with child pornography. The distribution of nude photos and pornographic images relate to the suffering, embarrassment, and frustration of female high school students because of the element of trust between them and a significant other.
Cyberbullying may lead to withdrawal from school. Bullying incidents are no longer limited to school campuses or community neighborhoods. Because bullying acts against high school students transitioned from face-to-face to digital platform, conflict is instantaneous and prevalent. As bullied students desire to remain anonymous or invisible during school activities to avoid contact with other students, victims may elect to stay home more frequently and steer clear of situations where they may be bullied (Salmon, James, Cassidy, & Javaloyes, 2000). High school students who experience ongoing bullying may ultimately withdraw from school functions. Victims of cyberbullying withdrawing from school was referenced 22 times from 12 participants, representing 13.3% of the coded data for RQ2.

Students who desire to withdraw from school do so as a result of their negative experiences on campus or their emotional stability after a negative encounter. One high school assistant principal explained,

Students withdraw from their current group of friends to align themselves with a new group of individuals, or they drop out of school. We are observing a rising number of students who desire to transfer out of our school and attend our virtual high school. Our virtual school opened for the first time for our high school level this year. Last year, the K-8 virtual school was the first year of existence, however, this year we expanded the virtual school to K-12.

The negative encounters and experiences influence students to withdraw from school as a response to their mental health and emotional stability. One high school counselor explained,
Cyberbullying is extremely severe when it’s reported. The impact of this severity is that students might miss some school however; other students transfer schools because they are not resilient enough to have peers tease them every day for something that was said in person. They enter the school one day and then go home. While at home, they're reading all the derogatory comments online about themselves.

Moreover, students who lack resiliency and encounter negative experiences at school are at greater risk of withdrawing. This decision is an effort to feel protected from harmful events such as bullying and daily teasing from friends. Since some students decide to withdraw from school, their level of anxiety decreases resulting from not being teased or harassed daily by other students.

**Heightened anxiety causes students to demonstrate acts of self-harm.**

Perpetrators who initiate threats of physical harm through text messages, emails, and social media posts induce anxiety and psychological fear in students. As students receive threats in the form of text messages, emails, and social media posts, they feel completely immobilized by fear to a point they become scared to attend class or eat lunch in the school cafeteria (DiBlasio, 2015). Additionally, when cyberbullying escalates to threats, it is a requirement parents and law enforcement be notified if the participant is a minor (Kowalski, 2008). For that reason, threats to harm someone physically initiates a flight or fight response in students to take precautionary measures to protect themselves from the perpetrator. Anxiety and self-harm resulting from cyberbullying was referenced 15 times from 12 participants, representing 9.1% of coded responses for RQ2. One high school assistant principal explained,
Our counselors will meet one-on-one with students if they feel like there is a student that’s considering harming themselves either by cutting or attempted suicide. Even if you say the words, “I’m going to kill myself,” the counselors will immediately make a referral. Our school resource officer will automatically get involved after we initiate contact through the local police department.

Verbalizing or demonstrating acts of self-harm was observed as a suicide risk by school administrative officials. The mental and emotional health of students with heightened anxiety that induces thoughts of suicide is an immediate danger to others. Another high school assistant principal stated heightened anxiety caused students to demonstrate acts of self-harm, noting,

The trained counselors and therapists will either recommend or take action to fill out the request for emergency transport. The transport will take the student to emergency health services for treatment. Once the treatment has concluded, the student would be on a 72 hour hold at the emergency health facility to determine when emergency healthcare professionals will release the student to their parents. The next step will be a follow-up on their health and wellness and if they’re attending some form of therapy.

This process is necessary to protect the student and school officials from legal action if the parents decide to submit documentation for a lawsuit. Students who demonstrate consistent outbursts in a combative manner will be referred to a medical facility by a trained counselor or therapist and evaluated by a healthcare professional. On a similar note, one high school counselor explained,
I can tell you there have been a lot of days where I feel like I work at a teen trauma center more than a school. The constant flow of students who are depressed, having anxiety, mental health issues, suicide, self-harm, cutting, suicide attempts, and a lot of teenage suicides are linked to the effects of bullying. We’ve definitely seen a lot of students have outbursts when they withdraw.

The quote from this high school counselor was consistent with perceptions of the assistant principals. Outbursts were prevalent from students excluded from social events, shunned by peers from social groups, or withdrawn as a result of bullying. If the victim displays reasonable fear from negative communications on social media or in person, threat is enough to initiate an investigation. Threats of harm are psychologically damaging and the consequences for such action are punishable by probation, fines, or even potential jail time.

Looking across all the themes for RQ2, the most often referenced related to cyberbullying impacting self-esteem and academic performance, which represented more than half of the coded themes for RQ2. This was followed by female students suffering from embarrassment and frustration, which represented another quarter of the data. Figure 3 depicts the number of themes along with the number of references to each theme for RQ2.
Findings for Research Question 3

RQ3 asked: *What do high school assistant principals and high school counselors perceive as essential strategies to counteract the effects of cyberbullying on students?*

The data resulted in 256 references falling into six themes. The most prevalent theme, relationship building with law enforcement, had 67 mentions representing 26.2% of all coded data for RQ3. This was followed by the importance of reporting cyberbullying to reduce incidents, which was referenced 52 and represented 20.3% of coded data. Other themes were unconditional support from outside counseling groups, presentation of information at orientation, anti-bullying interventions, and provision of a safe space for students and social media users (Table 4).
Table 4

*Themes for Essential Strategies to Prevent Cyberbullying*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>Interview Frequency</th>
<th>Artifact Frequency</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship building with law enforcement officers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting cyberbullying is important to reduce incidents</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconditional support from outside counseling groups who provide an important service</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of orientation and information programs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Bullying intervention</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a safe space for students and social media users</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Relationship building with law enforcement officers.** It is important for school officials and high school students to develop relationships with law enforcement officers to curtail cyberbullying incidents. School resource officers provide a direct link to local law enforcement agencies to build working relationships with the community and school (Barrios, 2000). The presence of sworn law enforcement officers assigned to schools is making a difference in communities as their presence is an influenced security measure combatting the erratic behaviors of high school students, parents, and school officials (Barrios, 2000). School resource officers conduct presentations for staff, students, and parents, and provide mentoring of students. Resource officers build a bridge between educators, students, parents, and local law enforcement agencies. The officers working on high school campus make every effort to establish a sense of security for the students and surrounding community. The theme of building relationships with law enforcement was referenced 67 representing 26.2% of the coded responses for RQ3.
During the interviews, all 12 participants provided content related to relationship building with law enforcement. One high school assistant principal explained, “The relationship we have with our school resource officer is Monday through Friday… Both the school district and police department realized that we needed a school resource officer to provide coverage five days a week.” School resource officers, including local law enforcement officers, provided coverage for the high schools during football and basketball season. Local law enforcement officers and members of the community engaged in friendly conversations during football and basketball seasons to establish trust and confidence between students and parents.

In like manner, one high school counselor said, “We have extensive partnerships with community agencies for mental health counseling, and law enforcement for any safety or legal issues.” To increase disciplinary measures with law enforcement, developing or revising school and district policies are needed to ensure bullying is not viewed as a rite of passage. A relationship with local law enforcement and the school resource officer can help determine the severity of the issue and follow-up in accordance with school district policies. Another high school counselor stated, “What I had never seen before was 10 police enforcement officers moving about the high school campus after school to make sure, students were being assisted and going their own way.” Local law enforcement and the school resource officer’s presence on campus was a security measure coordinated by school officials to protect high school students in accordance with a state-mandated child safety plan. Once school concludes for the day, local law enforcement and the school resource officers establish a presence to provide an extra added layer of security for students and parents who may encounter high-risk situations.
The presence of the local law enforcement officers is meant to curb the risk of fights and other physical altercations that may happen between students, parents, and others. Implementing extra security measures on campus with the presence of both local law enforcement and school resource officers displays the risk of de-escalating high volatile situations on a high school campus.

**Reporting cyberbullying is important to reduce incidents.** Recordings or screenshots of abusive text messages should be maintained and reported to proper authorities who can immediately eradicate incidents of cyberbullying. Because cyberbullying began to emerge in schools, students who reported this experience to teachers created tension in their peer social groups (Betts & Spencer, 2015). As solutions are limited in handling cyberbullies, attacks from the bully can be sustainable over a lengthy period. Moreover, if cyberbullying incidents are not reported, the perpetrator often becomes more aggressive. For that reason, being equally relentless and proactive in reporting each bullying or cyberbullying incident until it stops can alter the perpetrators efforts to establish psychological power and dominance. The theme of reporting every incident of cyberbullying was referenced 52 times from 12 all participants representing 20.3% of the coded responses related for RQ3. This theme was highlighted by one high school assistant principal explained,

What’s interesting is that over the past six years at this high school, we see a spike in students reporting bullying incidents. I assume it’s because the students are talking and educating one another about the effects of bullying on social media. The students are now pausing to examine the
information and drawing their conclusions that the digital texts and social media messages may be bullying.

In other words, students are now taking interest in the actions of their peers when it comes to posting derogative texts and social media messages. Another assistant principal stated,

When you are experiencing a new era of kids, they are now attached and playing on their phones. The administrators will secure these communications by text messages, Snapchat, or Instagram. Text-a-Tip is a program where students can anonymously report cyberbullying acts or threats of harm directly to the school district administrators.

To bring more clarity to the Text-a-Tip program, one high school counselor explained, “We have a phone line called text-a-tip. Text-a-tip is a phone number for students to report bullying or cyberbullying events anonymously. This number blocks the students’ number to remain an anonymous caller and the district can receive reports of bullying.” This highlights the need for students to understand physical bullying and cyberbullying are not accepted on campus or within a social media environment. By students and parents anonymously submitting a report to the Text-a-Tip hotline, school officials and administrators noticed a reduction in cyberbullying incident reports and physical bullying on campus.

Unconditional support from outside counseling groups who provide an important service. External counselling groups provide a forum for high school students to voice their concerns with healthcare professionals to better understand themselves and talk out their issues. Additionally, assistant principals and school
counselors could build a program to advocate for high-risk students by collaborating with outside resources to improve service delivery (Gruman, 2013). Furthermore, services and resources from outside of the school’s services assist students in developing plans on how to deal with problem behaviors (Alzayer, 2016). Therefore, outside counselling groups serve as ongoing support for high school students to assist those who display components of mental health issues and problems integrating with various student social groups. Support from outside groups was referenced 44 times from 12 participants representing 17.2% of the coded responses for RQ3.

During the interviews, all 12 participants provided content related to unconditional support from outside counseling groups. One high school counselor shared, “We have a memorandum of understanding with Riverside Mental Health. We also have someone who visits from the safe house. This individual visits by referral only, and that’s once a week.” This service helped students from dysfunctional home environments with no one else to speak with about issues at school. Another high school counselor explained,

We have a school psychologist who developed partnerships with our local hospitals. Community-based counseling resources work closely with victims of trauma, including victims of cyberbullying. Research shows that a bully isn’t necessarily socially or emotionally stable, so we try to include them in the support as well.

School psychologists and outside counseling groups were established for intervention with socially and emotionally unstable students. School psychologists were also available to parents who struggled to keep their child in school. Moreover, outside
counseling groups provided services to students from toxic family environments or who experienced traumatic events that triggers emotional instability.

**Presentations of orientation and information programs.** School district leadership and school officials typically develop presentations to disseminate informational updates to incoming high school students and their parents. Educational leaders often develop and conduct an orientation program for at-risk high school youth (Midgett et al., 2015). Although the components of the orientations typically included an audiovisual display with information about bullying strategies, small-group exercises to actively engage both the students and parents were found beneficial (Midgett et al., 2017). Use of presentation and informational programs to reduce bullying was referenced 34 times by 11 participants representing 13.3% of the coded responses for RQ3. One assistant principal described the school’s orientation, saying,

> During our presentations at the beginning of the year, we inform the students that if they suspect any form of bullying to report it. Currently, the ways to report incidents are anonymous. Everything the students tell us is confidential including the bullying report form that’s filled out and submitted.

At the beginning of the academic school year, administrators and school officials must conduct an orientation to new students attending their school. Key topics such as harassment, bullying, cyberbullying, and where to submit a report are presented during orientation. In addition to administrators sharing information, one assistant principal explained, “Other external organizations come in to give presentations to the students on specific subjects including harassment issues, cyberbullying, and physical bullying.
issues.” School officials coordinate with external organizations, such as law enforcement officers, to give presentations to students and parents on community issues and social trends that get people into trouble. Other external organizations included marriage and family therapists, mental health counselors, and psychologists who conducted presentations to educate both students and parents on mental health and suicidal issues. By coordinating with external organizations to acquire a subject matter expert to conduct presentations at high school orientations, parents, students, teachers, and administrative staff received updated information on social trends and social media communications, which brought awareness of serious life-threatening issues for high school students.

**Anti-bullying intervention.** Anti-bullying interventions can be effective in reducing bullying incidents on social media websites and high school campuses. Anti-bullying interventions are essential to establishing what measures positively effect change and what measures fail to be effective (Da Silva et al., 2018). Because anti-bullying interventions are important steps to eradicate cyberbullying incidents, interventions are effective tools to update district policies and implement professional development training among the school faculty. Thus, anti-bullying interventions require the assistance of students, school officials, law enforcement agencies, parents, and local communities. Use of anti-bullying interventions was referenced 32 times from eight participants and two artifacts representing 12.5% of the coded responses for RQ3.

One high school counselor explained, “As a counselor, I have to then deal with the student and their self-image. We have a ‘take charge of your life’ group or that emotional management support group where we have a little reality therapy and anxiety management.” The support group was conducted by high school counselors who teach
students how to be resilient when faced with adversity. This is an important anti-bullying intervention for this school because it established a security measure in which a responsible adult gained student trust. Similarly, another high school counselor shared, “I can tell you about the anti-bullying club. When we train the students of the anti-bullying club, the PowerPoint is generated by the students. They’re the ones who know cyberbullying issues and the ones who know the kids.” This school believe anti-bullying intervention began with the kids taking responsibility for their actions and developing solutions to integrate and engage other students to support a common purpose.

Given these points, a school district policy reviewed for this study identified an anti-bullying strategy as “Students are encouraged to notify a school staff when they are being bullied or suspect that another student is being victimized.” Also, the policy indicated school officials who witnessed bullying should immediately intervene to stop the incident. Another anti-bullying intervention strategy was highlighted in a parent/student handbook that said, “Parents need to monitor Internet and other electronics sites used by their children to ensure they or their friends are not posting information likely to be deemed as bullying.” Parents collaborated with school officials and law enforcement officers to provide initial intervention strategies to minimize cyberbullying on social media. Additionally, parents were perceived as the initial responders to issues regarding their children and social media communication. Overall, anti-bullying intervention was viewed as an effective strategy to ensure the safety of students.

**Providing a safe space for students and social media users.** School officials can designate specific spaces on high school campus that allow students to detach themselves emotionally from the student population and social groups. The development
of a safe space promoted the safety of individual victims, and initiated contingencies to leverage against perpetrating students and their parents; such intervention plans supported teenage victims to recover emotionally, socially, and academically without further bullying (Carter, 2015). Additionally, social media website developers design platforms allowing users to communicate through forums and chat rooms; therefore, a safe space for students is physically possible on a high school campus whereas safe space for social media users prove difficult because of information disseminated in cyberspace.

Providing a safe space for students was referenced 28 times from nine participants, representing 10.6% of coded responses for RQ3. One assistant principal explained how his office was safe space for some students, sharing,

> I find that my students come and sit in my office on their own recognizance. They can come in during class breaks and lunchtime, so they don’t feel isolated amongst their friends. I’ve only had that occur three times this year, where a student was going through a negative experience where they felt detached from their group of friends.

This aligned with research by Carter (2015) who found providing a safe space for students and social media users allowed them to concentrate on their academic studies. A safe space provided students who were victims of bullying a place to socially and emotionally recover from different forms of harassment. In the same way, another high school counselor stated, “As the assistant principal drills home the information to the students that school should be your safe space, it is our responsibility to keep each other safe and encourage them to come to the office.” Providing a safe space for students
helped them complete their academic work and not feel threatened by other members of the school community.

Looking across all the themes for RQ3, the most often referenced related to building relationships with law enforcement, reporting cyberbullying to reduce incidents, and support from outside groups, which represented. These three themes represented approximately two-thirds of the coded data for RQ3. Figure 3 depicts the number of themes along with the number of references to each theme for RQ2.

![Figure 4](image_url)

*Figure 4. Number of the themes and frequencies for RQ3.*

**Summary**

This chapter presented the data and findings identified by six high school assistant principals and six high school counselors regarding the impact of cyberbullying on
students in southern California. From the responses, 15 themes emerged from the study with the most referenced themes being cyberbullying impacts self-esteem and academic performance, aggressive communication, relationship building with law enforcement officers, cyberbullying is underreported, and reporting cyberbullying is important to the reduction of incidents.

The participants viewed cyberbullying as communication that can be corrected by informing high school students and their parents of the severity concerning social media and the psychological effects incurred from cyberbullying. Additionally, the participants viewed cyberbullying as a serious social and psychological trend that will get worse over time if not closely monitored by an adult or responsible third party. Although social media allows the immediate posting of texts, pictures, and other forms of communication, information for orientations and workshops need to be updated to educate parents and students on the effects of cyberbullying in high schools.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V begins with an overview of the research study, starting with the purpose statement, research questions, and methodology. Chapter V then describes the major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research. Chapter V closes with concluding remarks and reflections.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the perceptions of high school assistant principals and high school counselors regarding the impact cyberbullying has on students in southern California. The study also sought to identify strategies and prevention programs essential to counteracting cyberbullying, as perceived by high school assistant principals and high school counselors.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do high school assistant principals and high school counselors describe cyberbullying in California high schools?

2. What do high school assistant principals and high school counselors perceive as the impact of cyberbullying on high school students?

3. What do high school assistant principals and high school counselors perceive as strategies essential to counteract the effects of cyberbullying on students?

Research Methods

This qualitative study used semi-structured interview questions to identify and describe the behaviors high school assistant principals and school counselors use and the
impact cyberbullying has on students in southern California. A qualitative approach was appropriate because it satisfied the research purpose to deepen the understanding of the perceptions of high school assistant principals and school counselors who regularly encounter victims of cyberbullying.

The researcher conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with six high school assistant principals and six high school counselors for a total of 12 participants. An interview script with nine questions was developed by the researcher (Appendix B) and each participant was asked the same questions with additional probing questions asked to draw out detailed information as needed. Individual interviews were coordinated with a time and location convenient for the participant. Upon completion of each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed and prepared for coding. Each transcript was coded to produce emerging themes and patterns across interviews.

**Major Findings**

The major findings reflect the data analysis through common themes and patterns presented in Chapter IV and that align with the literature review in Chapter II. The following 10 major findings were derived from the data.

**Finding 1: The widespread use of social media has a negative effect on students when social media is used to post anonymous and aggressive communication.**

All interview participants indicated aggressive communication has a negative effect on student behavior. Aggressive communication is any toxic behavior communicated through electronic or digital media by hostile individuals and groups that repeatedly inflict harm, emotionally disturb, or psychologically hurt other people (Willard, 2007). Negative affect was defined as having negative emotions and
expressions, including sadness, disgust, lethargy, fear, and distress (Ackerman, 2018). High school students who consistently communicate aggressively with young adults and teenagers develop an emotional condition of extreme sensitivity. Participants explained aggressive communication was more common with technology as students could confront others without a physical altercation. Students who frequently communicated through social media and digital text by posting inflammatory comments were perceived as not wanting to be held accountable for their actions.

Participants noted aggressive communication was used to psychologically and emotionally hurt others. High school assistant principals and school counselors indicated school officials and parents need to collaborate to develop solutions to students making disparaging comments and sharing intimate on social media sites. The increased use of social media by students emotionally and psychologically impacted other users to become defensively hypervigilant resulting from acts of aggressive communication.

**Finding 2: Cyberbullying is underreported because victims feel reporting the issue will not make a difference.**

All interview participants indicated cyberbullying is underreported. High school victims of cyberbullying incidents do not tell their parents or other adult because they feel it will not make a difference. This finding was consistent with the research by Kim, Na, and Park (2014) who concluded extensive toxic behavior from social media usage decreases the ability to effectively communicate in-person. Interview participants noted being an antagonist online was easier than confronting individuals face-to-face and no repercussions were implemented for posting negativity on social media; cyberbullies could hide behind computer screens and mask their UP address for anonymity. One
reason cyberbullying was underreported was the difficulty in obtaining the identity of harassing individuals who mask their IP address or establish false profiles.

**Finding 3: Increased access to social media grants students’ ability to establish psychological power by posting threatening and intimidating messages.**

All interview participants indicated that social media websites are abused by students who cyberbully. Students who cyberbully continuously attempt to achieve psychological power by intimidating others through social media. Psychological power is intentional and repeated behavioral qualities that occur exclusively online, through rumors or via electronic mediums. The extensive use of smart phones by students provide a medium to consistently inflict psychological trauma to victims without fear of reprisal or consequences (Venkataraghavan, 2015). Participants noted this was accomplished through name calling and negative posts on social media or sharing embarrassing situations broadly through social media. Participants explained sharing intimate photos was often done after a couple had broken up. Opportunities for social media abuse by high school students increased exponentially resulting from access to the internet and digital device enhancements.

**Finding 4: Cyberbullying negatively impacts student self-esteem and academic performance.**

Interview participants indicated cyberbullying impacts self-esteem and academic performance. Respondents shared cyberbullying induced anxiety and depression in high school student as well as self-esteem and academic issues. High school students who exhibited signs of anxiety and depression were psychologically vulnerable to online harassment and become victims of cyberbullying when access to their personal
information is compromised (Paine, 2009). Intimate details of a person’s life distributed on social media had devastating effects to a person’s image (Willard, 2007). When this disruption impacts emotions of students who are victims of cyberbullying, it is difficult for them to successfully concentrate on attaining their education.

**Finding 5: Private photos of a sexual or physical nature targeting female students causes embarrassment and humiliation impacting interactions with peers.**

All interview participants indicated female high school students suffer from embarrassment and frustration as a common theme. Instant access to social media through digital devices provided an opportunity for users to violate the privacy of others. Female high school students are at an increased risk of embarrassment and frustration when consistently communicating through social media on their cell phones. However, parental monitoring of cell phone devices to manage online behavior and social media is difficult (Chassiakos et al., 2016). In addition to regulating a child’s online activities, parents must perform intervention strategies if their children are affected by cyberbullying (Beale & Hall, 2007). These ideas were also shared by the study participants. Participants indicated embarrassing situations were quickly shared online, and body shaming of females was a common outcome. The dissemination of naked and sexually explicit photos occurred on high school campuses despite being classified as spreading child pornography.

**Finding 6: School officials need to develop a strong partnership with law enforcement built on shared values to decrease cyberbullying.**

All interview participants indicated the need for relationship building with law enforcement officers. Strong relationships between law enforcement officers and school
officials are critical to maintaining student safety. High school victims of cyberbullying incidents and those constantly harassed by other students must display a level of trust with law enforcement officers to report threatening events. Additionally, students who experience toxic events that trigger suicidal ideations need to confide in law enforcement professionals to have a sense of personal safety. Participants highlighted the need for extensive partnerships with community agencies for mental health counseling and safety or legal issues.

**Finding 7: Anonymous reporting of bullying is critical to both the victim and individual reporting the incident.**

All interview participants indicated reporting cyberbullying was important to the reduction of incidents, and anonymous reporting was needed to increase the potential for students and others to report all incidents. High school students who experienced bullying, cyberbullying, or other harassment incidents must be made aware of a reporting system that maintains anonymity. Without anonymity, personal information can be compromised and used to further harass victims of cyberbullying. One participant noted seeing a spike in the reporting of bullying incidents and credited the increase to students talking and educating one another about the effects of bullying on social media.

Reporting cyberbullying or bullying incidents can be difficult for victims and bystanders because the individual may be the instigator of the incident. As an intervention method, participants reporting having an anonymous reporting system for students to submit their complaint of cyberbullying incidents. Education leaders initiated a text-a-tip reporting system to develop a level of trust between the victim reporting the incident and the school official initiating an investigation. By implementing the text-a-tip
reporting system, school officials and students can develop a meaningful relationship. Through reporting software systems like text-a-tip, reporting imprudent behavior of others has become much easier and victims do not have to worry about their safety.

**Finding 8: Utilizing outside counseling services is an important intervention to support students.**

Ten interview participants indicated outside support from counseling groups provided important intervention services to students. Outside support was important because of too few counselors in schools to address all the needs. Participants explained it was important to have partnerships and support from outside services. Outside counseling groups were available to assist students in building social skills and to teach students how to communicate their feelings appropriately. Participants reported mental health counselors, substance abuse counselors, social workers, and psychologists were available for high school students to assist with developing coping skills.

As an extra benefit of support, students were able to network with other individuals experiencing similar issues. One high school counselor explained the school psychologist developed partnerships with local hospitals and community-based resources to work with victims of trauma, including cyberbullying. Participants explained peer support program are needed for high school students, parents, and faculty to minimize the risk of experiencing cyberbullying acts.

**Finding 9: Presentations allow educational leaders to articulate standards and regulations to new high school students.**

All interview participants revealed orientation presentations are needed to psychologically connect with high school students. Orientations introduced specific
topics to new and current students on campus. Orientation workshops were designed to be conducted by the school staff to inform students of school policies and consequences of various social trends. One high school assistant principal said the school orientation included information about how to report bullying anonymously and explained everything reported was confidential including the bullying report form that's filled out and submitted.

High school social groups are affected by random changes within the student body. As each student is to counsel and be a positive influence on the others, orientation and information programs influence changes in behavioral patterns from each member of the social group and builds a bonded connection. One high school assistant principal found presentations by external organizations on such as harassment, cyberbullying, and physical bullying helped students better understand their role at the school. Such presentations had a positive influence on the high school students because the school culture constantly changes and annual programs remind students of the information.

**Finding 10: Anti-bullying interventions must address the social dynamics of bullying.**

Eight interview participants revealed anti-bullying interventions are needed to influence culture change on high school campus. Anti-bulling interventions are intended to expose the social dynamics of bullying behavior in selected peer groups. Positive peer influence impacts change in the social trends of peer groups. High school students who possess strong character values and organizational skills reported bullying to school administrators. Each student is responsible for being a positive influence on each other, and positive behaviors within a social group built a bonded connection.
Positive peer influence is necessary because students are more apt to listen to a peer than an adult. One school had an anti-bullying club that was ran by the students. This gave peers the ability to provide counsel directly to students so school officials could focus on professional development training for teachers and other staff members. Moreover, anti-bullying interventions were implied as the most effective way to prevent cyberbullying and maintain a positive school environment.

**Unexpected Findings**

The first unexpected finding was students engaged in cyberbullying by posting intimate photographs online were not held accountable by school officials or law enforcement. High school students who hide behind fake accounts on the internet felt entitled to post negative comments or intimate personal photographs of others on social media. Participants reported nasty breakups led to students posting negative comments or intimate personal photos online. Posting intimate photographs without consent is a felonious act in California (Dababneh, 2017) and high school students posting intimate and personal photographs of others can be charged with distribution of child pornography (Piety, 2018). Yet students still use fake accounts on social media websites to post such photographs. It seems many high school students who commit this type of act feel the consequences do not apply to them and nobody will hold them accountable.

The second unexpected finding was students who experienced cyberbullying were more likely to drop out of school, be truant, or not attend some classes during the school day. Victims of cyberbullying or who were physically harassed on the school campus were withdrawing from school. One high school counselor explained the severity of cyberbullying caused some students to miss school or transfer to other schools to avoid
their aggressor. Part of this withdrawal stemmed from students being harassed by peers after derogatory information was posted about them on social media or through a text. This created emotional pressure resulting in students falling behind in their education, being truant, or dropping out of school all together.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study and as supported by the literature, the researcher drew six conclusions inferring deeper insight into the perceptions of high school counselors and assistant principals regarding the impact cyberbullying on high school students in southern California.

Conclusion 1: Students engaging in cyberbullying are seeking attention through online postings.

Students seek attention through online postings. Today’s students are motivated by a social media following to gain popularity by how many likes they receive. This form of motivation creates a level of excitement and anxiety in students and releases a chemical in the body called dopamine. Dopamine released in the brain sends signals to nerve cells, increasing hormonal activity in the body that heightens emotions and anxiety in students. When students experience this level of continuous excitement, slowing down social media communication activities can become quite difficult.

High school students who stay connected to social media pages are attempting to increase the number of people who follow their page and achieve a lot of likes to pictures and other paraphernalia posted on their profile. Students who demonstrate this type of behavior feel the need to increase their own self-confidence. Additionally, high school students who desire to be the center of attention show narcissistic behaviors online and
consistently draw attention to themselves in social media chat groups (Bonser, Buffardi, Campbell, & De Wall, 2011). High school students unaware of their online approach in a social media environment tend to communicate with the same mentality and lack of filtered verbiage used in face-to-face interactions (Bonser et al., 2011).

**Conclusion 2: Lack of an anonymous system to report cyberbullying results in a higher percentage of incidents going unreported.**

The second conclusion was a lack of anonymous systems to report cyberbullying results in incidents being unreported. Students consistently online with their cell phones who experience cyberbullying incidents usually do not report it to their parents. Reporting this type of information initiates fear in the student where their parent may implement a strategy to take away their cell phone or modify their online communication activity. With more anonymous reporting systems in place, people would not be so hesitant or afraid to report cyberbullying incidents. Social media is the primary platform for individuals who possess and demonstrate their ability to exert narcissistic traits to exercise self-presentation (Leung, 2013). Parents must be proactive to monitor their child’s social media, internet, and digital communications to diminish cyberbullying activities. Students express negative communication as an outlet for their own anxiety and to receive attention to validate their existence (Leung, 2013). Parents and educators must encourage students to be resilient in reporting incidents of cyberbullying to an authoritative figure to achieve results and eradicate the issue.

**Conclusion 3: Students lack respect to others when using social media.**

The third conclusion is students display a lack of respect to others when on social media. The speed of information sharing increased exponentially over the last seven
years as students become nonchalant to the consequences of cyberbullying (Subramanian, 2017). Additionally, intimate details of a person’s life distributed on social media has devastating effects that can extensively damage a person’s image and lead to anger, embarrassment, anxiety, and even suicide. Educators and students will lack meaningful relationship unless strategies are developed and implemented to hold students and parents accountable. Students who demonstrated vulnerability and showed transparency may fall victim to cyberbullying when access to their personal information is compromised. Some students prefer to remain in their own world, separating themselves from interacting with adults, and thus isolation is chosen to physically become detached from a social group (Subramanian, 2017). Ultimately, outside clinical support and school counselors should increase their services for students labeled as high-risk.

**Conclusion 4: Students targeted by cyberbullying may suffer from psychological and self-esteem issues resulting in dropping out of school or suicide.**

The risk of suicidal thoughts is eminent in students with extremely low self-esteem. This psychological impact heightens the emotions of students that make it difficult for them to concentrate on their education. Results of the impact are isolation and withdrawal from peer groups where the induction of anxiety and depression are consistently displayed (Notar, Padgett, & Roden, 2013). School officials must be proactive to develop a character-building program to educate and mentor students and teachers of different ways to handle the risks of suicidal thoughts in students and other issues not observed. Moreover, school officials must make every effort to be clear in their expectations of the character-building program to produce a result defining the quality of the program and a pleasant experience for the student.
Conclusion 5: Female students are especially at risk of having personal/sensitive pictures posted resulting in social and psychological damage.

The sixth conclusion is that extensive teasing and body shaming increases anxiety and prolonged depression in female students with low self-esteem. Prolonged teasing and body shaming can result in consistent rejection and torment by peers (Teeters, 2018). Students consistently exhibit toxic behavioral patterns after experiencing embarrassment or peer rejection and tend to make fun of other people on social media websites as a form of retaliation. Students and social media users who post negative comments about a person’s body online could induce mental health issues, psychological stress, and eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia (Armour & Goodyear, 2019). Although other peers may consider themselves not being involved in the body shaming incident, bystanders can receive the same exact punishment as the perpetrator because of the lack of discipline to stop the issue. Furthermore, students who engage in body shaming or extensive teasing of another person are just as guilty as the individuals in their peer group committing the crime.

Conclusion 6: Anti-bullying programs can address reductions in cyberbullying.

The last conclusion is that anti-bullying interventions are making an impact on student culture. Anti-bullying interventions are strategies developed to deter acts of bullying through physical contact, digital text, or cyberspace in a social media community. Additionally, anti-bullying interventions are necessary to deter further acts of cyberbullying on high school campuses and to increase student physical and mental safety. A significant number of students are cyberbullied, and education leaders need to strive to find effective anti-bullying interventions. Anti-bullying interventions should be
developed to incorporate resiliency skills and a sense of self-control so the victim can respond to conflict effectively (Murray-Harvey, Pereira, Skrzypiec, & Slee, 2011; Terranova, 2009). Furthermore, anti-bullying interventions were found to increase digital safety in schools by having student peers implement an anti-bullying club (Murray-Harvey et al., 2011).

Implications for Action

The following implications for action are provided for high school counselors and assistant principals who may be looking to prevent cyberbullying. The implications for decision-making or training development are provided for high school counselors and assistant principals to improve themselves and their school environment. Implementation of these actions could result in tangible improvements for administrators, superintendents, community members, and other organizations.

Implication 1: Implement a conflict resolution training program.

Conflict resolution training programs contribute to the knowledge and awareness of bullying intervention policies (Brochu, 2017). High school students identified as aggressors and participants on social media or from hostile acts of behavior would be prime candidates for the program. Social media platforms are used by high school students to facilitate a negative emotional effect on others. Thus, the intent of the conflict resolution training program is to make a cognitive change in the student and within the culture. School officials should develop a robust conflict resolution training program for teachers and staff members to influence behavioral changes in students. School officials emphasized that cyberbullying is still happening, and many incidents go unreported. It is recommended high school students become thoroughly educated about social media
platforms and the possible consequences implemented by law enforcement officers. As school officials seek resolutions to rectify social media conflicts, students frequent social media websites to cyberstalk and target unsuspecting victims.

The best time to implement this training is during the 1st and 3rd quarters of the school year as these months are busier for high school students. The first quarter is football season and homecoming, leading into basketball season, where students attend games and traverse in groups around the stadium. The third quarter is track and field, spring break, and prom season where social media interactions are high among the high school students. Implementing the training programs during busy months will remind students of the dangers of cyberbullying.

**Implication 2: Increase the level of consequences for students who cyberbully.**

It is recommended both parents and school officials develop an action plan to detain student digital device to disconnect them from social media and decrease the levels dopamine to the brain. This action should be considered to re-institute the basics of face-to-face communication and teach students how to physically write and take effective notes. It is also recommended parents lock away their children’s digital devices so their behavior and level of excitement can be regulated to provide more concentration and focus on school assignments. According to Olson (2010), “Because of the unpredictability among school officials in regard to response and consequences, disciplinary actions administered against perpetrators have been diluted to prevent possible litigation from the perpetrators and their parents” (p. 10). Not allowing the student to operate any digital device for a minimum of 48 hours may positively modify
the student’s behavior. High levels of dopamine may become exhausted, but the drawback is the student may become combative and argumentative.

Partnerships established between high school officials and parents send a strong message to students about the severity of consequences (Beale & Hall, 2007; Hester, 2012). High school officials must consider the level of consequences for students who cyberbully and have a plan to address decisions with parents (Hester, 2012). Moreover, parents are a key source to regulating their child’s behavior when they are away from the home environment. Thus, it is recommended parents and school officials work together to eradicate cyberbullying before it becomes dangerously prevalent.

Implication 3: Implement resiliency classes for students, teachers, and parents.

The word resiliency is understood as the personal ability to emotionally rebound or quickly recover under difficult circumstances, stresses, and toxic conditions. High school students who demonstrated higher resiliency skills indicated they did not report acts of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2017). Additionally, high school students victimized by cyberbullying may not have the ability or motivation to emotionally recover from disparaging comments or the posting of intimate photos on social media. Some high school students have trouble displaying confidence as a result of emotional anxiety and need unconditional support from parents, peers, and teachers to psychologically protect the student and influence personal change. Parents and teachers are considered adult role models for high school students. Students look these adults for guidance. Teachers may have experience with challenging students who come from dysfunctional family environments.
Moreover, high school students suffer from different levels of depression, especially when they are immersed in a dysfunctional and toxic environment. By developing a resiliency program for high school students, teachers, and parents, confidence can be gradually restored. High school students, teachers, and parents also may display some triggers from past memories that invoke an emotional response and cause one to withdraw from the group or feel uncomfortable speaking about past negative experiences. Therefore, tier-level resiliency training can be merged with each high school grade level to cognitively develop student abilities to effectively respond to negative conflict. It is recommended district superintendents and school officials develop a tier-level resiliency professional development program for high school teachers and administrators. To implement resiliency classes, school administrators must solicit buy-in from the superintendent. Informational research should be conducted to ensure an individual’s rights of privacy are not offended. The best times to implement this training would be 72 hours after Labor Day, 48 hours before releasing students for winter break, and 72 hours before spring break. The reason for these specific dates is catch families at the start of the year and before they leave for family vacations.

**Implication 4: Team building between both high school assistant principals and high school counselors is needed.**

Teambuilding events between high school assistant principals and school counselors should be coordinated and developed at the beginning of the year as a part of leadership development. High school assistant principals and school counselors are defined by how they meet student needs and the level of their professional working relationship (Riddile, 2009). Teambuilding between high school assistant principals and
school counselors is to ensure both groups hold monthly meetings to officially establish accountability. Meeting minutes should be kept as a record shared and viewed by the high school principal. According to Riddile (2009), “Collaboration in building high-performing teams and creating a learning community that supports student success is an important by-product of principal and counselor interactions” (p. 4).

Teambuilding tasks would facilitate professional bonding between high school assistant principals and school counselors, thus influencing the school culture. The intent would be to foster healthy working relationships between the high school assistant principals and school counselors to benefit students. Teambuilding between both high school assistant principals and school counselors demonstrate leadership, unity, and cross-functional skillsets that support student, parent, and teacher needs (Riddile, 2009). Furthermore, high school assistant principals and school counselors bring a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and awareness to the team environment for a common purpose. It is recommended a developmental plan for teambuilding and the establishment of future goals become a standard to change the direction of the school culture.

Implication 5: Implement mandatory suicide prevention classes in school orientations and parent workshops.

Suicide prevention classes should be a mandatory part of an intervention process involving students, teachers, parents, and law enforcement. High school students, parents, and teachers in direct contact with students who express suicidal ideations are not qualified to conduct screenings or assessments but can better identify signs and seek professional assistance with proper training. High school students and other individuals who voiced or demonstrated the desire to commit suicide need someone to conduct
proper intervention to minimize the risk of self-harm. Some students victimized by cyberbullying display symptoms of depression and anxiety when they keep their emotions internally suppressed. As a result of cyberbullying, high school students may display some actions demonstrating a risk of suicide. As such, it is recommended high school students, teachers, and parents receive first responder training to increase student safety and deter suicide. Furthermore, it is recommended a tier-level suicide prevention program be integrated within each high school grade level to cognitively develop students to properly respond to individuals who display imminent risks of suicide. One resolution would be initiating a suicide prevention gatekeeper training program. Gatekeeper training instructs individuals to identify the warning signs of suicide and get students the proper assistance needed. Parents, teachers, and high school students should be train as gatekeepers; however, each program should to be tailored to a specific group. It is also recommended district superintendents and high school officials develop and implement a tier-level suicide prevention program for high school teachers and administrators as a professional development program.

**Implication 6: Hold students accountable for their behavior.**

Participants indicated holding students accountable for their behavior is one of the essential strategies to counteract cyberbullying. Holding students accountable for their behavior, especially when it comes to cyberbullying on and off campus, is a strategy an educational leader should not ignore. Hilton (2018) indicated “parents of children who are disciplined for cyberbullying behaviors will debate that the high school does not have authority to impose disciplinary measures when text messages are communicated off school grounds” (p. 27). When high school administration officials initiate consequences
to troubled students, parents can be an impediment to the school’s discipline process. Moreover, parents consider themselves their child’s first teacher and attempt to maintain some type of extensive control within the school system. This effort is to ensure both the teacher and administrator support the parents’ wishes for their child.

Parents receive a student/parent handbook from the high school that outlines the rules, regulations, and updated polices of the school district. However, parents may not take the time to review the handbook to become informed of policy changes. As such, parents may lack the knowledge and understanding of possible fines being administered to parents regarding their child’s mischievous acts in the school. It is recommended handbooks change the term cyberbullying to digital assault. This name change will then allow legal actions to be implemented by the local courts as a result of a California electronic policy update and other laws in connection with this subject. This action could help hold students accountable for their actions.

**Implication 7: Implement peer-led training intervention and prevention events.**

Peer-led training events should be developed and implemented on high school campuses as a part of cyberbullying prevention and intervention methods. Peer-led training events are where students desire to help one another by creating a structure where they are responsible and sensitive to other’s needs (Menesini et al., 2012). A responsible faculty member at the high school should oversee a peer-led training event, tasking the students to perform presentations and hold peer group meetings. Additionally, an intervention specialist position can be implemented either as a collateral duty assignment or a duty position at the district level that will ultimately focus on
building relationships among the student body. An intervention specialist will require the students to ultimately be active listeners and identify negative and toxic behaviors.

As part of the peer-led training program, it is recommended high school assistant principals and school counselors develop a training plan to integrate model students as intervention specialists. Specific training programs would be required to stay informed of student cultural changes and new social media trends. Furthermore, it is recommended professional training certification classes and workshops be developed to educate both parents and students of the emotional severity of cyberbullying and the level of fiscal consequences that may arise.

**Implication 8: Increase the awareness and knowledge of netiquette training among high school students.**

Netiquette training is needed to give a visual of word choice when it comes to communicating on social media. High school students and faculty members unaware of how to implement netiquette on social media websites should receive formal training by a certified paralegal specialist to emphasize the levels of psychological damages experienced by other users. Furthermore, high school students who consistently communicate on social media, coupled with a lack of knowledge and understanding, trigger negative behavioral patterns creating false perceptions of victims cyberbullied on various social media platforms. Developing a robust netiquette training curriculum for high school students, parents, and faculty will diminish the chances of victims becoming emotionally agitated or targeted by a cyberbully.

Victims from toxic and hostile environments are emotionally conditioned in the way they interact with others. Defense mechanisms some students display are perceived
as a result from consistent cyberbullying or harassment incidents prior to attending high school. The goal of netiquette training is to create a positive effect of resiliency on students who enter high school from middle schools or from toxic home environments. Therefore, it is recommended a netiquette training program be developed and implemented as an intervention strategy for cyberbullying events.

**Implication 9: Parents need to develop a plan to effectively monitor their child’s cell phone and internet activities.**

The content of information displayed within different age groups on social media is becoming more advanced as cognition progressively develops. Parents mediation and physical management strategies play a critical role in monitoring their child’s activities on the internet, mobile phones, and social media websites (Ang, Chew, Koay, & Soh, 2018). Parents normally do not have their child sign an active digital contract for their personal computer or cell phone; however, high school students are required to sign an electronic contract to use school-issued tablets and computers. Parents should impose similar rules for digital devices during the school year and holidays to lessen the opportunity of their child suffering from embarrassment and frustration of social media communications. Therefore, parents are ultimately responsible for their child’s behavior and actions while an active smartphone is maintained for communication and internet activity.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The following recommendations for further research were based on the results, conclusions, and limitations of this study.
1. Conduct a quantitative study to determine if there is a higher frequency of cyberbullying based on demographic data including race, language, economic status, and gender.

2. Conduct a mixed-methods study to understand cyberbullying of students with disabilities and the impact on their success in school.

3. Conduct a qualitative study to understand the impact of cyberbullying on students living in non-traditional family settings.

4. Replicate this study with private and alternative school principals.

5. Replicate this study in high schools with different demographics (e.g., high-achieving versus low-achieving schools) to determine differences in cyberbullying.

6. Replicate this study in rural school districts.

7. Replicate this study comparing schools that employ mental health professionals versus schools that do not.

8. Conduct a study to determine if there is a difference in self-esteem issues between male and female students who are victims of cyberbullying.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

This study impacted my understanding of what is encountered by high school assistant principals and school counselors regarding the effects of social media and cyberbullying. I completed 26 years of service in the United States Armed Forces where rules of communication and language delivery is understood differently from members of the private sector. I chose to research high school assistant principals and school counselors to minimize the impact of my personal biases and because education system
parallels the conceptional framework of military leadership. After each interview, small pieces of information emerged that were enlightening and could be used for my own personal knowledge and influence. My personal reflections led me to believe the behaviors of high school students are influenced from what they bring from their home environment, peer groups, and individuals who remain within their circle of friends.

Education leaders and school officials are limited when it comes to administering proper consequences to high school students who cyberbully. Research confirmed the evolution of digital devices and internet software updates increase the possibility of an individual’s personal information being compromised and used for acts of mischief. Digital devices and internet software updates institute attitude changes in children where the level of excitement produces the chemical dopamine in the brain. This stimulant produces a challenge for the parents’ ability to disconnect their children from digital devices without conflict or disappointment.

The academic process of the doctorate program showed me my strengths, weaknesses, and what I needed to improve to reach a milestone that many of my associates thought I would never achieve. Considering my childhood background and the environment where I grew up, my path to success changed because I initiated the steps to create that change. Culture, information, and communication is consistently changing, and I acquired the ability to conduct proper and credible research. I remain humble when it comes to the academic process; however, my days using academic jargon are slowly coming to a close. What this means is that while in this doctorate program, I have learned a different process and approach to academic writing. The language and approach to communicating with others at the beginning of this doctorate program
changed me where different words are used toward developing a pristine academic product.

During my literature review, the most important insight gained was learning about both the California State assembly bills and senate bills passed regarding the electronics act and cyberbullying. Another important insight gained was the information regarding the Interagency School Safety Demonstration act of 1985. This legislative act charges California public schools to develop safety plans to ensure students and campuses are safe from gang activity, hate crimes, discrimination, violence, and bullying. The results of this study demonstrated different perceptions of both high school assistant principals and school counselors, who do not consistently address cyberbullying incidents but are often the first contact with students from a nurturing and emotional standpoint. I hope this research provides some insight to the topic of cyberbullying where the results from the data will assist educational leaders, state leaders, and federal leaders with policy re-development and cultural change within staff and faculty.
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### APPENDIX A – SYNTHESIS MATRIX

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<th>Cyberbullying Literature Matrix</th>
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Hello, my name is Rodney Stone and I am a doctoral candidate at Brandman University. I appreciate you taking the time to share with me your knowledge and experience as a counselor who deals with cyberbullying. First, I would like to thank you for your service as a counselor and your passion for the occupation to serve the children of your community. The experiences and strategies you share will assist others to better understand and manage the issue of cyberbullying. You have received information about informed consent form, the Brandman Research Participants Bill of rights, Invitation Letter, and Counselor Interview Protocol: Script and Questions. The recorded interview will not reference your name in document title or URL. During the recording, the researcher will not refer to you by name. This will also hold true for any school name, school district name, or county name. The moment you ultimately feel uncomfortable with the questions asked during this interview, you can terminate the interview. Do you agree to participate in the recorded interview?

**Demographic Information**

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<th>Interviewee -</th>
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<td>Credentials and Certifications</td>
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**Research Question 1 Interview Questions**

1. How would you describe cyberbullying on your high school campus?
2. How would you describe the use of social media by students for cyberbullying?
3. What partnerships have been formed with law enforcement and other support agencies?

**Research Question 2 Interview Questions**

4. What is the impact of cyberbullying on students at your school?
5. What are the social/emotional impacts that you observe on students who have been bullied?
6. What counseling services do you provide to students that have experienced cyberbullying?

**Research Question 3 Interview Questions**
7. What has your school/district done to develop policies and strategies to counteract cyberbullying?

8. How do students know it is alright and safe to report cyberbullying?

9. What have been the most essential strategies to counteracting cyberbullying?
   Is there anything you would like to add based on your experience that you believe is important to managing cyberbullying of high school students?

**Interview Conclusion**

I would like to thank you for your participation in this research. As stated in the beginning, your identity will not be revealed and will remain extremely confidential. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call me at [redacted] or email: [redacted]
APPENDIX B – FIELDTEST FEEDBACK REFLECTION FORM

Instructions for Participant:

While observing of the researcher during this interview, take note of the researcher’s language delivery and body language. At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher will initiate a discussion of the following feedback prompts to questions to solicit your input. The researcher will complete a self-reflection on these same prompts in order to facilitate productive conversation.

Please provide constructive feedback regarding your observation. Your input will provide the researcher with valuable information that can be used to improve the interviewing process prior to conducting future interviews for tangible data collection.

Thank you for your valuable time and assistance!

Before the brief post-interview discussion, give the interviewee a copy of the interview protocol. If their answers imply that improvement is necessary, follow up for specificity.

1. How long did the interview last? _____
2. Was interview time block appropriate?
3. Was interview time block appropriate?
4. Did the researcher appear relaxed or uncomfortable during the interview?
5. Was the interviewer prepared to conduct the interview? Are there other measures the researcher could have done to be better prepared?
6. What sections of the interview went the most proficient and quantifiable?
7. What parts of the interview did the researcher struggle and what initiated your observation?
8. If there were any part of the interview that you would change, what suggestions would you make to improve the overall process?
Dear Research Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study of Southern California public high school assistant principals and high school counselors who have observed or experienced significant Effects of Cyberbullying and a shift in their school’s culture within the past 3-5 years. The main researcher of this study is Rodney C. Stone, Doctoral Candidate in Brandman University’s Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are a certified counselor at a public high school that demonstrated change in school culture and safety policies.

Additionally, your school’s student culture shift had been recognized by experts in this field. Approximately one counselor each selected from a total of 12 high schools, will be invited to participate in this study. Participation should require one hour or less of your time and is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the perceptions and experiences of high school assistant principals and high school counselors in Southern California regarding social media as it relates to cyberbullying. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify strategies essential for counteracting and preventing cyberbullying from the perspective of the high school counselor. This study will fill the gap in research regarding the reporting process of cyberbullying, changes in school culture as it relates to the level of trust between students and adults, and policy updates that complement electronic media instead of compartmentalized traditional policies.

**Procedures:** If you decide to participate in the study, you will be invited to participate in a face-to-face semi-structured interview (Counselors), conducted at your school site by the primary researcher. The interview of the discussion will be recorded and transcribed. A copy of the interview/discussion protocol is included with this letter.

**Risks, Inconveniences, and Discomforts:** There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient for you to meet with the primary researcher for up to one hour. Some interview questions may require you to describe personal experiences and may cause mild emotional discomfort.

**Potential Benefits:** There are no major benefits for your participation, however, a potential benefit may be that you will have an opportunity to share your expertise with other present or future school leaders and employees who may benefit from your knowledge and expertise. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators of best practices for transforming a comprehensive public high school’s culture. The results of this study will be used to develop a common language for leading and implementing positive cultural changes in high school settings.

**Anonymity:** Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study. You will be assigned a participant number. The recorded interview or focus
group discussion will not reference your name in document title or URL. During the recording, the researcher will not refer to you by name. This will also hold true for any school name, school district name, or county name. Any names used by the participants during the recorded session will be redacted from the transcript. The interviews and focus group discussions will be transcribed, reviewed, and maintained only by the primary investigator on a password-protected external storage drive.

At any time, should you have any questions that will assist in clarity and understanding of how this study will be performed, or how it will affect you, please contact the researcher, Mr. Stone, by phone at [redacted] or email [redacted]. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, and 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Very Respectfully,

Rodney C. Stone
Primary Researcher
APPENDIX E – INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Information About: The Effects of Cyberbullying as it relates to Social Media: A California High School Counselors Perspective

Researcher: Rodney C. Stone, Doctoral Candidate

Purpose of The Study: You are being solicited to participate in a research study conducted by Rodney C. Stone, a doctoral student from the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program at Brandman University. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the perceptions and experiences of high school counselors in California regarding social media as it relates to cyberbullying. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify strategies essential for counteracting and preventing cyberbullying from the perspective of the high school counselor. This study will fill the gap in research regarding the reporting process of cyberbullying, changes in school culture as it relates to the level of trust between students and adults, and policy updates that complement electronic media instead of compartmentalized traditional policies.

In participating in this research study, I agree to participate in a recorded semi-structured interview (counselors), which will be conducted in person at your school site. The structured interview will take approximately one hour and will be audio-recorded. During this interview, I will be asked a series of questions designed to allow me to share my experiences as a member of a high school community where positive shifts in school culture have been achieved. I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks or discomforts associated with this research. It may be inconvenient to spend up to one hour in the interview. However, the session will be held at your school site to minimize any inconvenience. Some interview questions may cause mild emotional discomfort. I understand that the investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and hard copy research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher and that digital information will be filed in a password-protected digital folder and only available to the researcher.

b) There are no major benefits to me for participation, but a potential benefit may be that I will have the opportunity to share my expertise with other present or future school leaders and counselors who may benefit from my knowledge and expertise. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators of best practices for transforming a comprehensive public high school’s culture. The results of this study will be used to develop a common language for leading and implementing positive cultural changes in high school settings. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.

c) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Rodney C. Stone, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Mr. Stone may be contacted by phone at [redacted] or email at [redacted]. Mr. Stone’s advisor, Dr. Keith Larick, can also be contacted at larick@brandman.edu.
d) I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. I may also decide not to answer questions during the interview. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.

e) I understand that the study will be audio-recorded, and the recordings will not be used beyond the scope of this research project.

f) I understand that the audio recordings will be used to transcribe the interviews. Once the interviews are transcribed, the audio and electronic interview transcripts will be kept on file for a minimum of five years by the investigator only utilizing Google Drive or another type of cloud-based server.

g) I also understand that no information that identifies me will not be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design, or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed, and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call of the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, and 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.

I have read the above and understand it and hereby voluntarily consent to the procedures(s) set forth.

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Signature of Witness (if appropriate) ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Signature of Principal Researcher ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Brandman University IRB _____________ 2019
BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

Brandman University IRB Adopted November 2013
APPENDIX F – AUDIO RELEASE FORM

I hereby grant Rodney Stone the right and permission to use audio tape and/or video record me for the purpose of the research project. I understand and agree that the recordings will be used for the sole purpose of collecting accurate data of the research study.

I understand that my identity will be kept confidential and all my individual rights regarding the Bill of Participant’s Rights will be adhered to and kept confidential. The recordings will be kept in a locked cabinet for three years and destroyed after that time frame.

Participating in this research study is voluntary. I understand that I may refuse to participate in, or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed, and my consent obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618 Telephone (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research participant’s Bill of Rights.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the research participant’s Bill of Rights. I have read and understand the above and consent to the procedures set forth.

________________________________________  ______________
Signature of Participant             Date

________________________________________  ______________
Signature of the Principal Investigator  Date