

# **Perceptions and experiences of Cyberbullying amongst high school students: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis**

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## Declaration

I, Sarah Jane Schofield (212534832), hereby declare that the Dissertation for Master of Social Science (Counselling Psychology) is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.

Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 28 June 2019 \_\_\_\_\_

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## Abstract

Cyberbullying is an emerging phenomenon among children and adolescents worldwide. Although the existing literature on cyberbullying is expanding rapidly, there is a lack of qualitative research, particularly in South Africa, which explores adolescents' perceptions of cyberbullying. Qualitative research allows researchers to uncover the important discourses, which undergird cyberbullying, and explore the nuances of the phenomenon, both of which are often less visible in large-scale quantitative research. The purpose of this study was to explore experiences and perceptions of cyberbullying amongst high school students from an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) perspective. These experiences and perceptions were obtained through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with six high school students from a school on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. Interview transcripts were analysed using IPA and this approach allowed the researcher to obtain a rich description of the participants' lived experiences and the processes by which they made sense of their experiences. Six super-ordinate themes were obtained from the data: (1) Perceptions and Characteristics of Cyberbullying, (2) Parent Monitoring, (3) Cyberbullying vs. Traditional Bullying, (4) Perceived Cyber Bystander Motivations, (5) Perceived Cyber Bully Motivation, and finally (6) Individual, Contextual and Societal Factors. Each super-ordinate theme consisted of several sub-themes, which captured and described the participants' lived experiences. The research findings suggested that although there are similarities between traditional bullying and cyberbullying, the latter appears to have a greater psychological impact on victims. Several factors associated with online activity appear to be appealing to cyberbullies and they are subsequently motivated to participate in bullying online. Furthermore, the cyber bystanders seem to play a passive role in the phenomenon, failing to intervene. This study contributes to the limited literature on this topic available in South Africa, and produces a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the emotions, experiences and perceptions of high school students involved in cyberbullying.

*Keywords:* Cyberbullying, Perceptions, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Brief Background

Traditional bullying is a significant public health concern that occurs worldwide and has received a vast amount of attention for many years (Espelage, Sung Hang & Mebane, 2016). What is meant by the designation 'traditional' are forms of bullying which do not involve the use of technology (and thus predated contemporary forms of victimisation). This form of bullying can take the form of physical, verbal or relational aggression (Olweus, 1993). Types of physical aggression include hitting, kicking and pushing, whilst verbal aggression includes name-calling or verbal abuse. Lastly, spreading of rumours and social exclusion are types of relational aggression (Lien & Welander-Vatn, 2013; Olweus, 1993). Technological advancements in telecommunications have resulted in the creation of a new type of bullying called cyberbullying. This has provided bullies with new methods and techniques to bully victims online (Ruedy, 2008).

A frequently used definition of cyberbullying is that of Hinduja and Patchin (2009), who describe it as “repeated harm inflicted using computers, cell phones and other devices” (p. 5). Types of cyberbullying include sending threatening messages, posting derogatory comments online and creating fake social media accounts (Guernsey, 2003; Ruedy, 2008). Both types of bullying share similar social, psychological and somatic consequences for those who are victimised. Copeland et al. (2013) reported that victims have a higher risk of “depression, anxiety, panic attacks and agoraphobia” (p. 1) as well as suicidal ideation (Mikulak, 2013) than non-victims. Cyberbullying has been described as a “complex and disturbing 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon” (Burnham, Wright & Houser, 2011, p. 2) as social media, the internet and cell phones have become embedded in the daily lives of children and adolescents (Tokunaga, 2010).

Cyberbullying has the potential to have a greater impact than traditional bullying, in some respects, as the bullies online are able to remain anonymous and subsequently face fewer consequences for their actions (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). In addition, Bauman (2010) argues that the anonymity and physical distance of technology has resulted in cyberbullies engaging in more hostile forms of bullying, compared to traditional bullies.

## **Rationale**

The majority of the current research, knowledge and evidence on cyberbullying is based on quantitative research, which focuses on questionnaires and objective analysis (Houghton, Nathan & Taylor, 2012). Although this type of research allows individual experiences to be deduced, it does not allow for exploration and understanding of the experiences and perceptions of individuals. Given that cyberbullying is a new research area, it is crucial to assess individuals' main concerns, experiences and perspectives in order to best understand their needs and difficulties, and to draw conclusions, which have relevance to researchers in the broader field of research (Charmaz, 2006).

Qualitative research allows researchers to uncover the important discourses, which undergird cyberbullying, and explore the nuances of the phenomenon, both of which are often less visible in large-scale quantitative research. Due to the lack of qualitative research on the topic of cyberbullying, we know less about children and adolescents' experiences and perceptions of this phenomenon (Mishna, 2009). In the last decade, some studies have focused on the way that children and adolescents from different countries perceive cyberbullying, the behaviours that they associate with it, the consequences experienced by the victims, the motivations of the bullies and the coping strategies that victims use (Ackers, 2012; Agatston, Kowalski & Limber, 2008; Bryce & Fraser, 2013). These studies have provided important information, allowing us to better understand children and adolescents' experiences and perceptions of cyberbullying (Navarro, Yubero & Larranaga, 2012). However, much of this published research originates from Europe, Australia and North America. There are a limited number of published studies in Asia and Africa (Ang & Goh, 2010). This study may contribute to the knowledge base concerning the nature of this growing phenomenon, in a South African context, and possibly help us to understand how South African high school students experience and perceive the phenomenon.

The literature indicates that traditional bullying and cyberbullying have certain characteristics in common, as well as some characteristics that differentiate the two. In order to understand cyberbullying, it is important to pay attention to the distinctive features of this type of behaviour, which are not present in traditional, "face-to-face" bullying (Kowalski et al., 2008). One of the distinctive features of cyberbullying is that of the cyber bystander, as there is a wider audience present on the internet in comparison to traditional, face-to-face bullying. However, there is a lack of research that focuses on the experiences of, and roles played by, the cyber bystander (Bauman & Bellmore, 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). Understanding

their role is crucial, as Duggan et al. (2014) reports that there are often more cyber bystanders than there are cyber victims, with over 70% of online users having witnessed cyberbullying. Therefore, there is a need to explore the role and influence they have on cyberbullying.

This study focuses on gaining a better understanding of high school students' perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying, using semi-structured interviews. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is used to make sense of the data and interpret the participants lived experiences. This study contributes to the limited literature available in South Africa, and creates a detailed and comprehensive account of the emotions, experiences and perceptions of individuals involved in cyberbullying.

## **Objectives**

The overall objective of the study is to obtain a clear understanding of the experiences and perceptions associated with cyberbullying amongst High School students. This includes understanding the experiences and perceived qualities of cyberbullying, the perceived difference between cyberbullying and traditional bullying qualities and lastly, the perceived differentiated roles in cyberbullying.

## **Research Questions**

In order to achieve the objective of the study (to obtain a clear understanding of the experiences and perceptions associated with cyberbullying amongst High School students) and upon review of the available literature, three research questions were derived (see below). These questions would be able to clearly understand cyberbullying, the differences between cyberbullying and traditional bullying as well as the differentiated roles in cyberbullying.

1. What are the experiences and perceived qualities of cyberbullying?
2. What are the perceived differences between cyberbullying and traditional bullying qualities?
3. How do students perceive and view the differentiated roles in cyberbullying?
  - a. How do students perceive and understand the motivations of a cyber bully?
  - b. How do students perceive and understand the role of the cyber bystander?

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter presents a review of the relevant literature, past and present. It highlights the various differences between cyberbullying and traditional bullying, the motivations of the cyberbully and the role of the bystander in cyberbullying.

### **Bullying**

#### **Definition and brief background.**

Bullying is a significant public health issue that occurs worldwide and has received a vast amount of attention for many years (Espelage & Sung Hong, 2016). Although bullying research has become a global phenomenon, an agreed upon definition has still not been derived (O'Brien & Moules 2010). The most often cited definition is that of Olweus (1993) (one of the foremost researchers in traditional bullying) who defines bullying as “an aggressive behaviour in which individuals in a dominant position intended to cause mental and or physical suffering to others” (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). This aggressive behaviour is seen as the base of communication in bullying and affects the repetitive bullying behaviour that occurs (Olweus, 1978). Olweus (1996) understood bullying to have three essential qualities: intention of harm, repetitive in nature and the involves a power imbalance between bully and victim. The victim may have difficulty in defending him or herself and thus is powerless against the bully. Olweus (1996) points out that “the actual and/or perceived imbalance in strength or power may come about in several ways” (p. 496). For example, the victim may physically be weaker or may perceive him or herself to be physically or mentally weaker than the bully. There is a difference between teasing and bullying. Students in schools are often teased daily, however when the teasing is repetitive, humiliating and harmful towards the victim, it, Olweus (1996) argues, then qualifies as bullying (Olweus, 1996).

#### **Types of bullying and areas of bullying.**

Bullying can occur in three ways. It can be physical, verbal (direct bullying) or indirect. Research has revealed that verbal and physical behaviour can be identified in distinct ways. These would include: intimidation, biting, direct violent assaults, kicking, insulting actions, name-calling, teasing, pinching, taking or breaking an individual's possessions, slapping and

the use of weapons (Klomek, Sourander & Gould; 2011; Lien & Welander-Watn, 2013; Veenstra, Lindenberg, De Winter, Oldehinkel, Verhulst & Ormel, 2005). Indirect bullying is often referred to as relational or social bullying (Archer & Coyne, 2005). This form of bullying has the potential to damage victim's self-esteem or social relationships (Atlas & Pepler, 1998).

Types of indirect bullying include the spreading of rumours, manipulation of friends, exclusion, stalking and gestures such as pointing. Cyberbullying can also be an indirect form as it mainly involves verbal aggression (threatening or harassing victims online) and relational aggression (spreading rumours online) (Field, 2007; Lien & Welander-Vatn, 2013; Olweus, 1993; Smith & Sharp, 1994). Evidence has revealed that verbal bullying (direct) occurs more frequently, where such behaviour accounts for approximately 70% of all reported incidents (Coloroso, 2005). Cyberbullying (as an indirect form of bullying) often remains unreported due its covert and anonymous nature. This results in the victim being unaware of their perpetrators identity. Although indirect bullying is often not reported, some research has revealed that girls are more likely to participate in indirect forms of bullying compared to boys (Olweus, 2003).

### **Consequences.**

Copeland et al. (2013) conducted a study on the long-term effects of bullying and results indicated that any engagement in bullying had various long-term effects on an individual. Schofield and Wassenaar (2014) revealed that university students who experienced bullying growing up, had a higher chance of suicidal ideation and suicide later in life, thus highlighting the long term impact of bullying. Additionally, individuals who were bullied had a higher chance of: (1) developing an antisocial personality disorder, (2) being fired from their jobs, being abusive or violent towards their spouses and involved in illegal behaviour such as substance abuse, juvenile delinquency or criminal behaviour (Coughlan, 2014; Heino, Rimpela, Marttunen & Rantanen, 1999). Copeland et al. (2013) reported that victims of bullying were at a higher risk of "depression, anxiety, panic attacks and agoraphobia" (p.1) compared to bullies. Engaging in bullying behaviour (as either a bully or a victim) also increases the risk of suicidal ideation or depression (Mikulak, 2013).

### **South African statistics.**

Botha's (2013) research indicated that bullying in South Africa is on the rise. An International Reading Literacy Study indicated that Grade four students in South Africa have one of the highest bullying statistics in the world. Sixty-eight percent of high school students in South Africa reported being scared to attend school, as they were often physically hit or threatened with weapons. Females were shown to experience more feelings of vulnerability compared to boys and 52% of the students indicated that both teasing and insulting were the types of bullying that occurred in South African schools (SAPA, 2013).

### **Differentiated roles.**

There are four positions or 'actors' in traditional bullying: the bully, the victim, the bully-victim and the bystander (Coloroso, 2005). Nearly all roles involved in bullying have an increased chance of mental and physical health challenges according to evidence found by Kim et al. (2006). Victims of bullying are four times more likely to develop a disorder such as anxiety in adulthood (Kuykendall, 2012). During their youth, victims may experience depression, suicide ideation, a low self-esteem and psychosomatic complaints. Some victims may resort to revenge against their bully, putting the victim at risk of being bullied further or even involvement in disciplinary hearings and actions at the school. However, not all victims retaliate or seek revenge as they feel powerless or lonely (Field, 2007). Olweus (1993) differentiated these two types of reactions by labelling a victim as either being passive, submissive or provocative.

Bullies are viewed as strong-minded individuals who may have suffered peer rejection and show features of manipulation and aggression (Coughlan, 2014). They may have suffered from bullying themselves and this may have directly or indirectly resulted in their engagement in bullying behaviours (Kuykendall, 2012). Field (2007) identified two types of bullies: malicious and non-malicious. On the one hand, non-malicious bullies seek attention from their peers; they are arrogant, engage in bullying on a daily basis and often target the 'weaker' peers. Malicious bullies, on the other hand, take pleasure in watching their victims attempt to retaliate. However, when a victim does not retaliate, the bully loses interest. Holt, Finkelhor and Kantor (2007) focused on bullying victimization in elementary students and they argued that a bully-victim often has either been bullied or provoked, which results in them retaliating towards the bully (thus the victim is identified as a bully). Characteristics of bully-victims include low self-esteem, easily provoked and not identified as a 'popular' student in the school.

Lastly, bystanders are those who witness the bullying. Bystanders participate in different roles, whereby they can either act as (1) assistants (who join the bully), (2) reinforcers (provide support to the bullies), (3) outsiders (remain passive or leave the conflict) or (4) defenders (help the victim) (Salmivalli, 2010). However, O'Connell et al. (1999) points out that evidence has revealed that bystanders rarely take the role of the defender. It is often perceived that individuals do not defend victims because they believe it is none of their business or they may not view the victim as their friend (therefore they do not need to stand up for them). Other reasons include self-protection as they fear possible consequences of getting involved, they are friends with the bully or do not like the victim. Lastly, bystanders may have a low social status among other students or they may be uncertain about their own ability or strength to assist the victim (Thornberg et al., 2012). The few students who do defend, however, defend because they experience feelings of empathy or worry for the victim (Bauman & Bellmore, 2015), they perceive the bullying to be unfair and wrong, they feel intense anger towards the perpetrator (Thornberg, 2010), they may be friends with the victim (Thornberg et al., 2012), they may have a high social hierarchy status among their peers, or they may want to demonstrate their caring nature (Thornberg, 2010).

## **Cyberbullying**

### **Definition and brief background.**

The rise in technological advancements has provided opportunities for new social interactions amongst people; however, it has provided cyber bullies with new ways and techniques to bully victims (Ruedy, 2008). Children and adolescents' internet usage has increased significantly worldwide in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the usage of social media and internet activities have become embedded in their daily lives (Tokunaga, 2010; Livingstone et al., 2011). Cassim (2013) reported that cyberbullying has become increasingly prevalent among children and adolescents and it is believed to be more detrimental than traditional bullying.

This complexity and increase of new technologies has thus led to many changes in how bullying can be defined and there are currently several definitions for cyberbullying. The lack of clarity regarding a definition has resulted in difficulties in understanding and measuring rates of cyberbullying (Tokunaga, 2010). For example, prevalence rates and the consequences of cyberbullying may differ across research due to different definitions used (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). Majority of the definitions highlight important aspects of cyberbullying, such as

intentional harm, repeated actions and a power balance that exists between the victim and the perpetrator (Slonje & Smith, 2008). A definition commonly used in cyberbullying research is that of Hinduja and Patchin (2009) who define it as “repeated harm inflicted using computers, cell phones and other electronic devices” (p. 5). Through the use of technology, a bully is able to send or post hurtful, embarrassing or even intimidating messages and information to a victim, to bystanders or to a very ‘public’ environment where others can participate.

In addition to the above-mentioned definition, cyberbullying can also include using electronic media to sexually harass a victim, distribute messages or pictures of a sexual nature or to request sexual acts (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Schrock & Boyd, 2008). Cyberbullying can occur through many mediums, including chat rooms, email, internet websites (that allow for social interaction and the exchange of ideas), blogs, instant messaging such as Whatsapp, social networks and other web devices (Guernsey, 2003; Ruedy, 2008; Sturgeon, 2006; O’Keefe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). An alternative method of cyberbullying includes posting a rumour on an online website or social media platform (Ruedy, 2008).

### **Perceptions of Cyberbullying Definitions.**

Vandebosch and Van Cleemput (2008) reported that adolescents’ perceptions of cyberbullying vary, and differences in perceptions are based on the context in which it occurs as well as the understanding of the definition. For example, students indicated that they perceived cyberbullying to be defined as ‘bullying through the internet’ (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). Other students from Liebert’s (2008) study believed that cyber bullies often meant something as a ‘joke’ and had no intention of causing the victim harm, however victims perceived it as cyberbullying.

O’Brien and Moules (2010) conducted a study in order to gain a better understanding of how students (ages 10-19) understand cyberbullying and its definitions and features. Results indicated that students associate cyberbullying with having traditional bullying methods such as “harassment, antagonising, tormenting, threatening through different forms of technology. Some even regarded the physical distance between the victim and bully to be important aspects of cyberbullying” (p. 23). Although the students perceived cyberbullying to be similar to traditional bullying, the physical distance between the victim and bully is what differentiated the two types of bullying. In addition, they perceived cyberbullying behaviour as secretive, repetitious and a creation of constant fear amongst students (O’Brien & Moules, 2010).

## **Cyberbullying in South Africa.**

Cyberbullying in South Africa is a growing, pertinent challenge that many schools are currently faced with (Goodno, 2011). According to a study conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund, South Africa is one of the main consumers of mobile technology as well as social networking on the continent of Africa (Beger & Sinha, 2011). Cassim (2013) and Tustin et al. (2012) conducted cyberbullying studies in South Africa and both reported that it is an increasing phenomenon amongst the youth in the country and that the consequences has significant long lasting emotional effects. In addition, the Centre of Justice and Crime Prevention indicated that almost 46% of students had experienced some form of cyberbullying in a South African high school (Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, 2012).

## **South African Cyberbullying Legislation and Policies.**

Although there is currently South African legislation that protects students in schools from bullying in general, there is no legislation or policy that specifically focuses on minimising or controlling cyberbullying in schools (Burton & Mutongwiso, 2009). The nature of cyberbullying results in problems associated to the basic human rights of students and educators (that is guaranteed by the Constitution) (Republic of SA, 1996). In South Africa, cyberbullying is not prohibited by the legislation of the country, which appears to be a major challenge to the legal system (Smith, 2015).

The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (2014) defines cyberbullying as “acts involving bullying and harassment through the use of electronic devices or technology” (p. 2). Whilst there is currently no specific legislation or policy that controls cyberbullying in South African schools, the perpetrator may be criminally charged with *crimen iniuria*, assault, criminal defamation or extortion. *Crimen iniuria* includes the “unlawful, intentional and serious violation of dignity or privacy of another person” (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (2014, p. 2). Assault is seen as an unlawful and intentional act or omission which leads to an individual's bodily integrity either being directly or indirectly impaired or which creates a belief or fear in an individual that such impairment will be carried out. Criminal defamation is defined as the unlawful and purposeful publication of a subject or topic concerning another that significantly effecting his or her reputation (including verbal or written defamation).

Lastly, extortion is committed when an individual unlawfully and purposefully acquires some advantage, which “may be of either a patrimonial or non-patrimonial nature, from another, by subjecting the latter to pressure, which induces him or her to hand over the advantage” (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2014, p. 2). In addition to the above mentioned charges, a victim of cyberbullying can apply at a Magistrate’s court (nearest to them) for a protection order in terms of the Protection from the Harassment Act, 2011 (Act 17 of 2011).

### **Cyberbullying factors.**

#### ***Gender.***

Research has shown that cyberbullying amongst genders varies (Donegan, 2012). O’Brien and Moule’s (2010) indicated that boys do not engage in cyberbullying to the same extent as girls. In addition, results revealed that twice as many girls had experienced cyberbullying in some way. This may be because cyberbullying is more text and language based and girls tend to be more vocal and verbal compared to boys (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Anderson & Sturm, 2007; Keith & Martin, 2005; Jackson, 2009). In addition, females appear to embrace the anonymous nature of cyberbullying (Li, 2006). For example, Hinduja and Patchin (2010) revealed that girls use anonymous name calling online such as ‘slut,’ ‘whore’ and ‘bitch.’ Online name calling with boys included boys labelling boys as being gay. The gender differences however are inconsistent across research. For instance, some studies have found evidence that boys have a higher chance of participating in cyberbullying (Dehue, Bolman & Vollink, 2008; Shariff, 2008). Alternatively, Aricak (2009) and Beran and Li (2005) found no association between gender and cyberbullying.

#### ***Economy.***

Access to financial resources has a large impact on cyberbullying. Students who are financially stable and therefore have the latest technology devices are able to have easier access to the internet and social media (Topcu, Erdur-Baker & Capa-Aydin, 2008) and therefore are over-represented in the cyberbullying population. To further illustrate this point, Syts’ (2004) study revealed an indirect socioeconomic effect on the occurrence of cyberbullying. The study was conducted in a rural area and results showed that teenagers did not have access to devices such

as cell phones or laptops, therefore there was a decrease in the chances of cyberbullying or falling victim.

### *Age.*

Findings related to age differences of children and adolescents who experience cyberbullying varies. For example, Beran and Li (2005) and Smith et al. (2008) found no age effects. However, it has been reported that some researchers believe that cyberbullying is heightened in middle school or high school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). High school students displayed anger and frustration, compared to junior school students who reported to experience more feelings of sadness because of being cyberbullied (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). The difference in emotional repercussions may be because younger children are not faced with the challenge of being part of a school social hierarchy, which typically exists in high schools (Donegan, 2012).

### **Cyberbullying consequences.**

Some research has indicated that the effects of cyberbullying are more severe than the effects of traditional bullying, due to the anonymous nature of the perpetrator, the wider audience and the continuous exposure to the messages. Hurtful messages can be ‘screen-shot’ on cell phones and shared among many bystanders (Mishna, 2009; Twyman et al., , 2010). The difference in severity of cyberbullying and bullying consequences however is difficult to prove and many studies show a significant overlap of the consequences (Erdur-Baker, 2010; Dehue et al., 2008). Victims of cyberbullying may experience serious psychosomatic and psychosocial health problems. Victims have reported feeling depressed, disarranged, blameworthy, scared, isolated, embarrassed, angry and sad. They reported experiencing a low self-esteem, self-doubt, self-blame as well as interpersonal problems compared to non-victims (Mishna, 2009; Raskauskas, 2010; Ferdon & Hertz, 2007). In addition, the misuse of drugs and alcohol, poor academic performance and delinquent behaviour are some of the reported negative consequences (Beran & Li, 2005). Research has indicated that cyberbullying victims and even offenders have a higher chance of attempting “bullycide”, which is defined as the act of committing suicide as a consequence of cyberbullying (Mishna, 2009). Hinduja and Patchin (2010) argue that although teenagers who are cyberbullied have a higher chance of committing suicide, many of them prior to the cyberbullying may be experiencing other emotional and

social issues in their lives. Thus, the effects of cyberbullying are aggravated by the current instability and hopelessness.

### **Cyberbullying vs. Traditional Bullying**

Cyberbullying has similar characteristics to traditional bullying, for example the repetition, power imbalance between the victim and bully and the harmful intention of the bully. Mishna (2009) and Twyman et al. (2010) however, indicate that cyberbullying results in more severe consequences than traditional bullying, as the bully is anonymous and there is a wider bystander audience. The difference between cyberbullying and traditional or face-to-face bullying are as follows:

#### **Anonymity.**

As mentioned previously, in comparison to traditional bullying, cyberbullying is more anonymous (Steffgen & Konig, 2009). During cyberbullying, the cyber bully is able to hide his or her identity behind a computer or cell phone screen, thus making their appearance 'anonymous.' This allows for the bully to not physically witness their victim's response; therefore, they may not be aware of the harmful consequences of their bullying (Donegan, 2012). Given this, cyber bullies may experience lower empathy than those who bully in the traditional sense (Steffgen & Konig, 2009; Strom & Strom, 2005). This type of anonymity further allows an individual to participate in behaviour online that they would not usually engage in offline (Cross et al., 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Cyber bullies are also harder to trace online, thus the consequences of their behaviour is perceived as non-existent. (Strom & Strom, 2005).

#### **Greater exposure.**

Victims may experience verbal traditional bullying at school, whereby a number of students or bystanders may witness it. However, with cyberbullying, the bullying may continue online (cyberbullying) when a victim goes home (Shariff, 2009). This shift leads to greater exposure in cyberspace where the amount of bystanders increases significantly. In addition, many of these bystanders would not usually participate in traditional bullying at school, however, due to the anonymity; bystanders are more likely to engage in cyberbullying behaviour online

(Cross et al., 2009). For many adolescents using social media, there appears to be a “sense of permanence about cyberbullying” (O’Brien & Moules, 2010, p. 13) as messages in cyberspace are often irreversible and cannot be deleted once in the hands of others. Thus, the irreversible and continuous sharing of messages contributes to the heightened exposure.

### **Victims cannot escape.**

Cyberbullying can occur at any time, due to the technological accessibility that individuals have and adolescents’ have their cell phones on them majority of the time (Shariff, 2009; Centre for Justice & Crime Prevention, 2012). Perpetrators are able to invade the privacy of their victims on multiple online devices or social media sites, therefore leaving few places for the victim to ‘escape’ from the bullying (Dempsey et al., 2009). Tokunaga (2010) argues that this accessibility may lead to more psychological damage when compared to traditional bullying.

### **Non-verbal cues.**

During online activity, non-verbal cues are absent, thus increasing the chances of victims misinterpreting messages and reducing perpetrator feedback (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009). Respondents in Smith et al.’s study (2005) indicated that cyber bullies often assume that they are making a ‘harmless fun joke’. However, due to the absence of non-verbal cues, the perceived ‘harmless fun joke’ is taken seriously and has more consequences compared to face to face interactions (Smith et al., 2005).

### **Lack of adult/parental supervision.**

Due to several types of social media sites, instant messengers and internet chat rooms, cyberbullying is difficult for parents, teachers and adults to monitor (Willard, 2006). In addition, many parents do not monitor their children’s’ cell phones or social media usage, therefore cyberbullying is less visible than traditional bullying (De hue et al., 2008). Mason’s (2008) study for example revealed that more than 50% of parents did not monitor their children’s social media usage. Children and adolescents may not inform their parents about cyberbullying as they may be scared of receiving punishment or having their computer or cell phone privileges removed (Bath, 2008). Parents also may not be informed due to the perceived ‘generation gap.’ It is assumed that adults or parents do not have knowledge or expertise in

new technological advancements (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Dehue, Bolman & Vollink, 2008). Although a significant amount of adolescents do not inform their parents about their cyberbullying experiences (O'Connell, Price & Barrow, 2004), research has revealed that adolescents who are involved in traditional bullying do not inform their parents either (Mishna & Alaggia, 2015).

### **Isolation.**

Cyber victims are often cyberbullied in isolation, and results in the victim feeling more alone and helpless (Winter & Leneway, 2008). In addition, the consequences of isolation, openness and immediacy of cyberbullying results in the victim experiencing deep emotional scars (Huang & Cha, 2010). Traditional bullying normally occurs at school with other students physically present. However, when a victim is cyberbullied, cyberspace divorces them from the reality of seeking help or being helped by a teacher, parent or bystander. Therefore, cyberbullying may have a worse impact on a victim compared to traditional bullying.

### **Motivations of a Cyber Bully**

The disinhibition effect may explain why individuals engage in cyberbullying behaviour. Joinson (1998) defines disinhibition as a behaviour that is linked to a decline in concerns or worries about an individual's presentation and judgement of others. While using the internet, due to the anonymous nature of cyberspace, it results in the fostering of disinhibition (Suler, 2003). Being online creates a sense of invisibility which leads to the elimination of social disapproval or concerns of the consequences (Willard, 2005). Olweus (1993) points out that individuals participate in bullying, as there is a 'benefit component.' Therefore, individuals may use aggression or participate in bullying in order to gain something or to be in control. These motivations can be explained by Social Dominance Theory, which highlights that aggressive behaviours (such as bullying) normally occurs in either children or adolescents to gain social status in the school social hierarchy (Pellegrini & Long, 2002). Adolescents who may not be physically 'big' enough or not popular to participate in physical bullying may resort to cyberbullying as they will not have any fear of retaliation (Hobbs, 2009).

In some instances, parents expose their children to violent or abusive interactions at home, which shapes the way their child will communicate and interact with others (Pepler et al., 2008). Olweus (1993) further argues that sometimes students who bully often grow up in

an environment that consists of inconsistent parenting. In addition to parenting, the general community may also have an influence. Individuals may also engage in bullying behaviours as they may have a genetic predisposition to this behaviour or they may have a higher chance of developing poor behavioural control disorder (Parsons, 2005).

### **Perceptions of cyber bully motivation.**

Varjas et al. (2010) conducted a study that focused on High School Students' perceptions of motivations for cyberbullying. Two themes emerged: internal motivations and external motivations. The internal motivations were linked to the perpetrators emotional states and the external motivations were acquired from factors specific to the situation or target. Within the internal motivators, the students identified the following to be the bullies' main motivators: redirecting of feelings, revenge, making themselves feel better, boredom, instigation, protection, jealousy, seeking approval, trying a new persona and anonymity/disinhibition. The external motivators consisted of no consequences, non-confrontational and lastly the target/victim was seen as 'different'. It was perceived that a cyberbully believes that he or she can get away with cyberbullying without fear of consequences, physical revenge or observing the emotional responses from the victim. Students also believed that a cyberbully did not want to confront the victim face-to-face and therefore cyberbullied instead. Lastly, the external motivator of seeing the victim as 'different' was based on the idea that the victim physically appeared 'different,' had a poor reputation at school or 'stood' out from the other students.

### **Why the victim?**

Certain individuals and populations of students are susceptible to falling victims of cyberbullying. Evidence has shown that bullies often victimise students with disabilities or mental health problems. Students who are either lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender are also at greater risk (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Victims are often perceived by perpetrators as being 'weaker' and this results in them being 'easy targets' (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). These 'weaker' individuals are described as being strange, shy or physically small. It is also the case that individuals at school who are struggling, in terms of their either academics or behaviour, are more at risk (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). They are often victimised as they are normally perceived as insecure, cautious, and have poor communication and problem-solving

skills (Glew et al., 2005). Often, poor self-esteem may result in the victim blaming him or herself for being bullied and this contributes to the victim not reporting the incident/s.

### **The Role of the Cyber Bystander in Cyberbullying**

Similar to the bullying positions in traditional bullying, cyberbullying positions include the cyberbully, cyber victim, cyber bully victim and cyber bystander (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). Majority of the cyberbullying literature focuses on the experience of either the victim or the cyber bully (Bauman & Bellmore, 2015). However, there is a lack of research of the role that cyber bystanders play in cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). Understanding their role is crucial as Duggan et al. (2015) reported that there are often more cyber bystanders than there are cyber victims, with over 70% of online users having witnessed cyberbullying. Therefore, due to the high amount of bystanders online, there is a need to explore the role and influence they have on the phenomenon.

#### **Definition of cyber bystander.**

The majority of cyberbullying research focuses on the victim or the bully, however there is minimal information about the role that the cyberbullying bystander (named cyber bystander) plays (Bauman & Bellmore, 2015). In traditional bullying incidents, bystanders play an active or passive role (Salmilvalli, 2010). The active and passive reactions can also be applied to cyber bystanders. According to Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco (2001) the bystander role is “an active role with a variety of manifestations, in which an individual or group indirectly and repeatedly participates in a victimization process as a member of the social system” (p. 215).

Active cyber bystanders include individuals who support the cyberbully by either sharing, ‘liking’ social media posts or assisting the victim by defending them online or intervening. Passive cyber bystanders observe the incidents without intervening (Gini et al., , 2008). Evidence has indicated that over 70% of internet users have witnessed cyberbullying (Duggan et al., 2015). Given the high percentage of bystanders online, there is a need to understand the role that they play in cyberbullying.

### **Motivations of cyber bystanders.**

Barlinska, Szuster and Winiewski (2013) highlighted three factors that increase the chances of bystanders engaging in negative bystander behaviour (participating in the bullying or sharing posts), such as: (1) the cyberspace conditions, (2) the private nature of the act, and (3) the experience of being a cyberbullying bully. Due to cyberspace conditions, cyberbullying is often anonymous and bystanders are more likely to engage in negative behaviour as the private nature of the act minimises their socially disapproved behaviour. Bystanders who participate in this behaviour and who essentially become the bully may take pleasure in their behaviour and this may result in further cyberbullying participation (Wicklund, 1975).

### **Gender.**

Studies focusing on cyber bystanders and gender have shown inconsistent results. Machackova et al. (2013) for example found no gender differences in bystanders supporting victims online. However, Van Cleemput, Vandebosch and Pabian (2014) indicated that girls are more likely to intervene and support the victim.

### **Cyber bystander roles.**

The role of bystanders in cyberbullying may be more complex compared to traditional bullying. During traditional bullying, a small amount of bystanders often witness and observe the physical bullying. However, during cyberbullying, there is potentially a much larger audience on social media and the internet who observe the bullying (Twemlow et al., 2004). Lenhart et al. (2011), for example, found that bystanders are the biggest group on social media sites when compared to either perpetrators or victims.

### ***Active Cyber bystanders.***

As mentioned previously, cyber bystanders respond in an active or passive manner. Active reactions from bystanders consist of particular intervention strategies whereby those who observe the bullying act may actively decide to intervene in the incident by either deleting or forwarding the cyberbullying content (Barlinska et al., 2013). Choosing to forward the content will spread it to a wider audience, which then perpetuates the cyberbullying and results in the

victim experiencing more psychological harm. The wider audience allows for more information to be shared and accessed (Barlinska et al., 2013). Thus, the number of cyber bystanders who encounter the harmful content and actively participate in bystander behaviour may far exceed the number of bystanders in traditional bullying.

The motivation of a bystander to continue to spread a cyberbullying post or delete it depends on their level of empathy. Empathy can be described as the ability to recognise, understand, and share the emotions and sensations of others (Singer & de Vignemont, 2006). Empathy is underlined by the bystander's ability to 'mentalise.' This ability to mentalise is associated to the cognitive aspect of empathetic responses and it encourages a bystander to adopt a deeper, empathetic understanding of the victim's circumstances (Frith & Frith, 2003). Studies have shown that individuals who are more empathetic are more likely to delete the post (Barlinska et al., 2013; Freis & Gurung, 2013).

Participants' in a study who decided to actively intervene, indicated that they preferred to intervene in a more direct way such as contacting the victim privately to provide support instead of defending them online (Schultz et al., 2014). Bystanders' who actively assisted the victims, reported doing so because of their morals and desire to stand up for the victim (Cappadocia et al., 2011).

### *Passive cyber bystanders.*

Some bystanders remain passive and do not react to the cyberbullying. This may be seen as being positive for the victim as the bystander is not spreading the information which results in less harmful behaviours (Barlinska et al., 2013). If this however occurred in traditional bullying, it may be interpreted as going 'against' the victim, encouraging or accepting the bullying behaviour (Menesini et al., 2000). Garcia et al. (2002) argue that often bystanders do not help in cyberbullying incidents as they believe that they are not responsible for helping the victim and fear being caught up in the harmful behaviour. Allan, Patterson and Cross (2015) focused on bystanders' experiences and perceptions of cyberbullying. Results revealed that majority of the participants ignored incidents of cyberbullying and some only intervened if the victim was a close friend. Shultz's et al. (2014) study revealed that participants did not want to be involved in cyberbullying as they either felt uncomfortable, believed that it was none of their business, they wanted to avoid drama or they were scared that the bully would cyberbully them.

## Summary

This chapter explored and examined relevant cyberbullying literature. Taking into account the study's aims of exploring students' perceptions and experiences of: (1) the difference between cyberbullying and traditional bullying, (2) the motivations of a cyber bully and (3) the role of the bystander, the literature review focused on these three areas. It is evident that cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying in terms of factors such as anonymity, greater exposure, victims are unable to escape, non-verbal cues, lack of adult/parental supervision and isolation. Literature revealed that students' perceptions of the definition of cyberbullying varied due to the context in which it occurs as well as the general understanding of the definition. Cyberbullies were motivated to engage in cyberbullying due to multiple reasons. However, the main reason included the anonymous nature of cyberspace. Research indicated that students' perceptions of the cyberbullies' motivations differed. Some perceived motivations included seeking revenge, boredom, jealousy, seeking approval, anonymity, no consequences and no physical confrontation.

A gap in cyberbullying research is that of the bystander's role. The literature indicated that cyber bystanders play a crucial role in cyberbullying. Similar to traditional bystanders in bullying, cyber bystanders adopt an active or passive role. Students' perceptions of cyber bystander roles are dependent on several perceived factors. These include moral beliefs, level of empathy, believing it was none of their business, attempting to avoid drama or fear that the cyberbully would retaliate.

As mentioned previously, there is minimal cyberbullying research in South Africa. Thus, by exploring and examining South African high school students' perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying, it may provide important information for cyberbullying research, interventions, and school policies. Before attempting to gain a better understanding of how students perceive and experience cyberbullying, the following chapter will explore two theoretical frameworks that frame the study.

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

### **Introduction**

Researchers have indicated that the field of cyberbullying lacks a sound theoretical foundation (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2010). Relevant theoretical frameworks are therefore needed in order to improve the effectiveness of cyberbullying knowledge, prevention and intervention. This chapter will discuss two theoretical frameworks that will assist in understanding cyberbullying. First, the Social Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) will be discussed, as it is “an umbrella under which many of the other theories fit” (Bauman & Yoon, 2015, p. 254). This theory will explain how cyberbullying behaviour is influenced by a larger social context that includes peer groups, schools, families, neighbourhoods, communities and culture. Secondly, the Bystander Theory (Twemlow, Fonagy & Sacco, 1996) will examine the importance of victim, bully and bystander interaction, whereby the bystander adopts different positions, depending on their ability to mentalise, subjective state and position in the social system.

### **Cyberbullying: The Social Ecological Theory**

As mentioned above, the majority of cyberbullying research lacks a theoretical framework to explain the complexity of the phenomena (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). However, Swearer and Espelage (2004) argue that the Social Ecological model can be applied to better understand the complex and interrelated relationships between the individual and the different systems associated with bullying or cyberbullying behaviour. Although the model has previously been applied to traditional bullying, Baldry, Farrington and Sorrentino (2015) argued that it can also be applied to cyberbullying. Both types of bullying occur in “nested contextual systems” (Swearer et al., 2010, p. 142) where individual, group and societal characteristics mould and shape bullying behaviour (Benbenishty & Astor, 2005).

This theory of bullying and victimisation is modelled on the work of Uri Bronfenbrenner (1994). Bullying behaviour and experiences occur as a result of the complex and mutual interactions between five socio-ecological systems in which the child is embedded. The five systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The microsystem includes the interactions that directly affect the child’s development. Examples of interactions at this level include exchanges within

the family, school or community (Ah Yoo & Chung Huang, 2013). Bronfenbrenner (1997) believed that these interactional patterns between children and individuals or environments are the most influential in shaping and moulding stable aspects of development. Peers in the microsystem play an influential role in cyberbullying as cyberbullying seldom occurs in isolated dyadic interactions. Rather, it occurs in the presence of other students; particularly, the bystander (Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003).

The Mesosystem consists of interactions that exist between two or more Microsystems in which a child plays an active role. It contains sets of associated microsystems and interrelationships between them (Cole, 2005). An example would include the interactions between the family and school (the involvement of the parents in the school). The exosystem involves settings in which the child is embedded but does not directly participate in. Although this is the case, the exosystem still impacts the environment in which the child directly interacts. An example of an exosystem in bullying dynamics would be broader issues of safety and crime in the neighbourhood setting. In this case, unsafe neighbourhoods may indirectly influence bullying behaviour due to poor adult supervision or peer pressure (Hong & Espelage, 2012).

The macrosystem describes the culture or social conditions in which the child lives (Ah Yoo & Chung Huang, 2013) and is known as the cultural ‘blueprint’ for any given society (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Garbarino and Ganzel (2000) indicate that this blueprint can be described as the combination of the ideological and institutional systems that characterise a particular culture or subculture. Bullying and cyberbullying differs across cultures and contexts (McConville & Cornell, 2003). Leach (2003) points out that school norms may have an impact on bullying behaviours among students in terms of their race or ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic background.

Lastly, the chronosystem takes into account a time perspective and the changes that occur over time in an individual’s life and environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). An example would include changes in the family structure due to either a death or divorce (Swearer & Espelage, 2004). Changes in the family environment that results in an unstable home environment may have an impact on bullying behaviours (Breivik & Olweus, 2006).

In order to understand cyberbullying behaviour, it is important to acknowledge different levels of influences such as “intrapersonal, interpersonal, group or organisational, community, immediate environment, and policy-related ecological conditions” (Espelage & Swearer, 2004, p. 248). It remains to be seen how systemic influences at all the above levels impact cyberbullying dynamics. We will return to considering this further in the discussion section of

this dissertation. To further explore the interaction that occurs in the microsystem between a bully, victim and bystander, the Bystander theory will be discussed below.

### **Bystander theory**

Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco (2004) argue that bullying must be understood as a triadic dynamic: an interaction occurring between bully, victim, and bystanders (Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2004). This triadic interaction highlights that neither side of the relationship has any meaning without the other. Depending on the interactions and dynamics between each role, each role is able to shift. Twemlow et al. (1996) argues that the bystander has a large and important influence on the victim-bully balance (Twemlow et al., 1996). This appears to be an important consideration when considering cyberbullying dynamics as the nature of interaction on social media sites often intentionally or unintentionally place large groups of users in active or passive bystander roles (Ball et al., 2008).

Twemlow et al. (2004) proposed seven different bystander roles based on case studies. Each type is differentiated according to factors such as the bystanders' ability to mentalise, subjective state, and the role they play in the social system at school (see table 1) Allen, Fonagy, & Bateman (2008) define mentalisation as the ability to attend "to mental states in oneself and others" (p. 1). Mentalisation includes "self-awareness, self-agency, reflectiveness, and accurate assessment of the mental states of self and other people" (Twemlow et al., 2004, p. 217). Adopting a Hegelian perspective, individuals define and understand themselves through social feedback during their interactions with others. Over time, an individual's mind constantly changes due to feedback from others. When an individual however is not recognised or acknowledged by others, their mentalising ability becomes poor and this may result in aggressive or violent behaviour (Twemlow et al., 2004).

Twemlow et al. (2004) further argue that within a violent community, bystanders may not be able to consider the needs or emotions of others, thus resulting in poor mentalisation. When a bystander is not able to experience a sense of connection to other people, they may feel guilt or shame and this results in engaging in negative bystander behaviour (Twemlow et al., 2004). Twemlow et al. (2004) highlighted seven different bystander roles: bully bystander, puppet-master, victim bystander, avoidant bystander, abdicating bystander, sham bystander and helpful bystander. During bullying incidents, the bystander will take one of the previous mentioned roles. The *bully (aggressive) bystander* may engage in bullying by actively joining the bullying or encouraging it by either laughing or using gestures. *Puppet-master bystanders*

have the ability to manipulate people and contexts in order to achieve their personal goals. They lack authentic empathy and reflectiveness and adopt an arrogant subjective state. *The victim (passive) bystander* remains passive and they stand back and observe the bullying while keeping quiet. The *avoidant bystander* may facilitate victimising by denying personal responsibility. The *abdicated bystander* will attempt to use scapegoating in order to relieve themselves of any responsibility. The *sham bystander* lacks authenticity in relation to how they respond to a bullying incident. They take sides depending on their personal or political reasons and may exacerbate the situation or empathise with the victim (Twemlow et al., 2004). An important role in bullying is that of the “*helpful (altruistic) bystander*,” as Twemlow et al. (2004) proposed that they are a critical part of the solution to bullying.

Twemlow et al. (2004) argue that bystanders are either uncomfortable in non-altruistic roles or are left with an important decision to choose what bystander role they will adopt. The decision to choose what role a bystander will take is dependent on physical and social environmental factors. Physical environment factors include distance and proximity to bullies and victims (Davis & Davis, 2007). Social environmental factors include the availability of parents/ guardians, teachers or peers for support. Other factors include bystanders’ physical characteristics such as social and academic status (Davis & Davis, 2007) and social skills (Stueve et al., 2006). Lastly, the intrapsychic qualities of the bystander such as their self-awareness, empathy and self-efficacy influence both the bystanders’ position and the control of the bystander (Twemlow et al., 2004; Kohut, 2007).

## **Summary**

Applying the Social-Ecological Model and the Bystander Theory serves as an effective rationale for understanding the influence of the environment as well as the impact it has on the different bullying or cyberbullying roles. These frameworks will provide a holistic assessment of the phenomenon and assist in explaining the different factors that may contribute to the participants’ experiences and perceptions (Doll & Swearer, 2006). The following chapter provides an overview of the research methods and procedures used in this study.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This study attempted to qualitatively understand and explore high school students' perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying from an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis perspective. These perceptions and experiences were obtained through one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six high school students from a school on the South Coast, KwaZulu-Natal. This chapter discusses the research design used for the study, the sampling methods, data collection methods and the steps taken to analyse and interpret the data. Lastly, the ethical guidelines that were followed and the reliability and validity of the study are discussed.

### **Research Design**

This research study made use of a qualitative research design. According to Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) this type of design allows researchers to “collect data in the form of written or spoken language, or in the form of observations that are recorded in language, and analyse the data by identifying and categorising themes” (p. 47). By using such a design, it allows for researchers to explore human action from participants themselves in order to gain an in-depth, better understanding of the themes and categories of information that unfold from the data (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). Using a qualitative approach would hopefully generate a rich, in-depth description of the participants' feelings, experiences, perceptions and understanding of cyberbullying (Denzin, 1989).

### **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used in analysing the qualitative phase of the study in order to explore and understand how high school students perceive and understand cyberbullying. According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) “IPA is a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences” (p. 1). The main goal of IPA researchers is to explore how individuals understand their experiences. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) indicate that it is believed that people are constantly actively engaging in making sense of specific events, objects and people in their

lives. To examine this process, IPA is informed by “concepts and debates from three key areas of the philosophy of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 11). Therefore, IPA focuses on gathering a rich description of human lived experience (phenomenology) and it positions participants in specific contexts in order to understand their personal views (idiographic) (Smith et al., 2009).

## Sampling

### The study setting.

The study was conducted at a high school on the South Coast, KwaZulu-Natal. The school is a Government school, consisting of 283 female and 226 male students. Table 1 below illustrates the race distribution of the students. The community that the high school is based in, differs in terms of socio economic status. Some of the students are from wealthy backgrounds, whilst others live in rural areas. In terms of challenges currently facing the high school, bullying appears to exist, as well as substance abuse such as alcohol and marijuana.

Table 1

*Race Distribution at a high school on the South Coast, KwaZulu-Natal.*

Race	Percentage
African	44.7%
White	29.2%
Asian/Indian	21.2%
Coloured	4.3%
Other	0.3%

### Sampling design.

The sampling method used in this study was purposive. According to Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) this type of sampling “means that sampling depends not only on availability and willingness to participate, but that cases that are typical of the population are selected” (p. 139). Smith et al. (2009) indicate that IPA sample designs are often purposive as it provides insight into the specific experience. In addition, participants are chosen on the idea that they can provide knowledge and experience on the particular phenomena being studied, therefore

they ‘represent’ a perspective and not a population. Therefore, high school students were chosen as I needed to focus on high school students’ perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying.

In the case where there were more than six students wanting to participate in the study, stratified sampling was used. This sampling is “used to establish a greater degree of representativeness in situations where populations consist of subgroups or strata” (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 136).

### **The subjects.**

Smith et al (2009) suggest that IPA research projects normally consist of a small sample size as detailed analysis of the data is extremely time consuming, therefore a smaller sample size is deemed more appropriate. They further suggest that three to six participants is a reasonable sample size for IPA, specifically for a student completing their research project. In addition, the sample size is dependent on the goals and purpose of the study (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). The sample consisted of six high school students. The table below illustrates the participants’ demographic information.

Table 2

#### *Demographics of the six participants*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Grade</b>
<b>Bhengu</b>	17	Male	Black	12
<b>Mark</b>	18	Male	White	12
<b>Kevin</b>	16	Male	White	10
<b>Kendra</b>	16	Female	Black	10
<b>Ayavuya</b>	15	Female	Black	9
<b>Crystal</b>	17	Female	Coloured	11

A total of nine students volunteered to participate in the study, however the parents of two participants indicated that their children were too busy with extra mural activities and could therefore not participate. Seven participants remained, however the study aimed to interview only six participants. Thus stratified sampled was applied. This sampling is “used to establish a greater degree of representativeness in situations where populations consist of subgroups or

strata” (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 136). It was important to therefore make sure that all participants were representative in terms of age, race and gender. Since two of the participants were both white, male and in Grade 10 (16 years old), a decision was made to only include the white, male, 16-year-old participant who signed up for the study first.

### **Overview of the participants.**

*Ayavuya* is a 15-year-old, black female in Grade 9. She had been both a victim and bully of traditional bullying and cyberbullying. She is from a dysfunctional and unsupportive family which has had an impact on her anxiety, aggression and bullying behavior.

*Bhengu* is a 17-year-old, black male in Grade 12. He had not experienced cyberbullying, however growing up he was bullied for being overweight. This has subsequently effected his self-esteem and current presentation.

*Kevin* is a 16-year-old, white male in Grade 10. He experienced cyberbullying victimization, whereby someone created a fake social media account in his name. Due to the nature of the fake social media account, it created a fear that people would perceive him as gay.

*Mark* is an 18-year-old, white male in Grade 12. He had not experienced cyberbullying or traditional bullying; however, he had observed both.

*Kendra* is a 16-year-old, black female in Grade 10. She had experience both types of bullying growing up and placed emphasis on the high expectations in society of females. Her experiences resulted in her presenting herself as ‘strong’ and ‘wearing a mask’ in order to avoid further bullying.

*Crystal* is a 17-year-old, coloured female in Grade 11. She experienced cyberbullying victimization, whereby someone created a fake social media account in her name. In addition, she was also bullied by a teacher at school.

### **Participant recruitment.**

Before participant recruitment could begin, approval from the HSS Research Ethics Committee (*see appendix A*) was required, as well as from the Department of Education (*see appendix B*) and Headmaster of school (*see appendix C*). Once permission was granted, participant recruitment was able to begin. Following permission from the Headmaster of the school, posters (*see appendix D*) were placed around the school building.

## Data Collection

### **Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews.**

This study used semi-structured interviews with individual participants, each lasting approximately 45 minutes. These were used as this allows “rich detailed accounts of the participants’ perceptions regarding cyberbullying” (Johnson, 2009, p. 80). It allowed students to elaborate on their perceptions and experiences of the phenomena. Interviews were used instead of focus groups, as the topic of cyberbullying could possibly be sensitive to particular students and therefore these students may not give their opinion in a group situation due to their fears of being judged or possibly feeling vulnerable (Johnson & Onwuegbusie, 2004). This type of interviewing is “easily managed, allowing a rapport to be developed and giving participants the space to think, speak and be heard. They are therefore well-suited to in-depth and personal discussion” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57).

With IPA individual interviews, audio-recording is the preferred recording method and parental/guardian and participant consent was obtained. As I was a novice IPA researcher, an interview schedule (*see appendix E*) was used in order to prepare the researcher for the possible content of the interview as well as allow the researcher to actively engage and listen to the participant (Smith et al., 2009). This schedule was developed according to the research questions; however, it merely assisted in facilitating the discussion of relevant topics (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). This also assisted in creating a comfortable interaction with each participant, which allowed them to provide a thorough account of their experiences and perceptions.

The interview schedule assisted in planning for any difficulties that might be encountered during the interview. It was therefore affective for example, when interviewing Kevin (participant three), as he was extremely reserved and not forthcoming with information, therefore using a more structured approach assisted in gaining adequate data. In addition, during the interview with Kendra (participant four), she became emotional and audio-recording was subsequently stopped in order to be ‘present’ in the moment with her. Thus, the schedule allowed me follow on from where I had previously stopped.

## **The self as an instrument**

In qualitative, interpretive research, it is the researcher who is the “primary instrument for both collecting and analysing the data” (Terre Blanche et al, 2006, p. 276). It is therefore important that the researcher has the skills to observe, question and to interpret. Researchers should also be able to both describe and interpret their own role and presence in the study. Smith and Osborn (2008) point out that the interviewer plays a significant role in ensuring that the interview gathers good, in-depth data on the phenomenon being studied. Thus, the interviewer was responsible to interview both effectively and sensitively in order to achieve rich and interesting data (Smith et al., 2009).

## **Reflexivity**

It was important that I was an ‘instrument’ to achieve reflexivity. Reflexivity in qualitative research is often understood as a way of ensuring rigor (Rinlay, 1998). According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004), “Reflexivity involves critical reflection of how the researcher constructs knowledge from the research process” (p. 275). This reflection includes different factors that influence how the researcher makes sense of each participants’ experience, for example gender, race, age, sexual orientation, personal experiences, morals, political or theoretical views and emotional responses to the participants (Hamzeh & Oliver, 2010; Bradbury-Jones et al., 2007). It was important that as a researcher, I was aware of any potential influences and take a step back to critically assess my own role in the research process. This resulted in improving the overall quality and validity of the research and the “credibility of the findings by accounting for researcher values, beliefs, knowledge, and biases” (Cutcliffe, 2003, p. 137).

In 2010 and 2011, I experienced both traditional bullying and cyberbullying. These experiences ignited a passion and desire to study and produce research around the topic of both types of bullying. My Honours Dissertation for example focused on the correlation between bullying in school and suicide ideation in university. After working as a School Counsellor and Teacher at a high school for two years, I was further exposed to the detrimental effects of bullying on students. My bullying experience and observations had a positive influence on the process of data collection and data analysis. It allowed me to approach the study with some knowledge and insight about the subject, as well as being aware of how to address the topic more sensitively. In addition, I was able to hear the unsaid, probe more efficiently and understand the implied content. Although my experience created benefits for the research, it

was important that I was aware of the negative aspects that my experience may result in. For example, Drake (2010) indicated that a researcher's familiarity or experience may increase the risk of personal values, beliefs, and perceptions being imposed by a researcher as well as projection of biases. Therefore, during each interview I made a deliberate effort to maintain the separation between my cyberbullying experience and opinion and the participants' perspective. It was important that I allowed each participant to communicate their own experiences and perceptions, instead of project any biases.

## **Procedure**

Following the participant recruitment procedure, recruitment slips (*see appendix F*) were given to the Headmasters Personal Assistant (who assisted the researcher) and during the morning and afternoon school notices (through an intercom), the students were informed of the study. Students interested in participating were instructed to see the Personal Assistant. If a student wanted to participate, they filled out the recruitment slip and placed it in a sealed envelope that the Assistant kept in a safe place. Upon telephonic feedback from the Assistant, it was indicated that there were a total of nine students. Informed consent forms and information letters for the participant (*see appendix G*) and their parents/guardians (*see appendix H*) were sealed in envelopes (labelled Participant 1, Participant 2 etc.) and were given to the Receptionist at the school. The researcher privately contacted each participant to inform them to pick up an envelope from Reception. Students were also informed to give the relevant forms to their parents or guardians to sign. Two of the participants indicated that they were unable to participate in the study. I then contacted the available participants and an appropriate time and date were discussed.

Interviews are able to "provide us with a snapshot of a person's attempts to make sense of their experience" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 67). In order to improve the quality of these snapshots, it was important that I prepared adequately for the interview. The interview schedule was practiced and discussed with the supervisor in order to produce a more natural setting and conversation during the interview process. Burman et al. (2001) highlights the importance of having a natural interview process as it allows for authentic expression from participants. The site of the interview is crucial as it must be a relatively familiar, comfortable, safe and free of any distractions or interruptions (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, the boardroom of the highschool in the South Coast, KwaZulu-Natal was used as the interview site as it provided a safe and private environment.

During data collection it was crucial from the start that rapport should be established with the participants as they needed to be comfortable with me. Succeeding in the establishment of rapport will result in a higher chance of obtaining good data (Smith et al., 2009). With the parents/guardian and participants' permission (as agreed to in the consent form, audio-recording began. During the interview, the interview schedule was used as a guide as to how best move from general to more specific issues. Once the interviews were completed, the audio-recordings were transcribed on a word processor in order to record the data collection and for analysis to occur (Smith et al., 2009).

## **Data Analysis**

The main goal of IPA lies in its analytic focus, where the main focus is directed towards the participants' attempts to understand and make sense of their experiences and perceptions. "As a result, IPA can be characterised by a set of common processes and principles which are applied flexibly, according to the analytic task" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). Data analysis in IPA is described as an iterative and inductive cycle (Smith, 2009). Given the idiographic nature of IPA, each case was analysed in depth before analysing the next case. The six step process proposed by Smith et al. (2009) was used in order to analyse the data. The steps were as follows: Reading and re-reading, initial noting, developing emergent themes, searching for connections across emergent themes, moving to the next case and lastly looking for patterns across cases. Before the six step process began, hard copies were printed for each transcript. Three margins were created which included a blank margin (used for emerging themes), a margin for the original transcript and lastly the exploratory comment margin.

The first step focused on reading and re-reading of the transcripts. It was important that I fully immersed myself in the original transcripts. I thus actively immersed myself in the data, by firstly listening to the audio-recording before reading the transcript. Following the latter, I re-read each transcript several times so that I could understand and make sense of each participants lived experiences. It was crucial during this step that I began the process of entering each participants' world, in order to fully engage with the data.

The second step focused on the initial level of analysis, which according to Smith et al. (2009) is the "most detailed and time consuming" (p. 83). It was important during this step to maintain an open mind and note anything of interest in the transcripts. This allowed me to become familiar with the transcript and identify particular manners in which participants communicated and understood their perceptions and experiences.

During both step one and two, I began writing notes on each transcript, followed by further exploratory comments after subsequent readings. Smith et al. (2009) indicate that there is no specific rule or process regarding what to comment on, however it is important that the researcher is able to provide a comprehensive and in depth set of notes or comments. During the notes, my comments were descriptive in nature which had a clear phenomenological focus in order to remain close to each participants' understandings. These type of comments described the things that mattered most to the participant such as their relationships, places, events and the specific meaning of each of these things for the participants. Developing from the descriptive comments were linguistic comments, which allowed me to understand how and why each participant had that particular concern. I therefore focused on the language that they used as well as identifying the contexts of their concerns. Lastly, conceptual comments were used and these allowed me to engage in each transcript at a more interrogative and conceptual manner.

Step three included developing emerging themes. This step involved mapping interrelationships, connections and the patterns between exploratory notes. I found this step challenging as I needed to play a role that was more interpretive in nature in order to make sense of each participants lived experiences. The main focus was to produce and identify important comments or phrases that “speak to the psychological essence of the piece and contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 92). Once themes were identified for each transcript, step four could begin.

This step focused on searching for connections across the identified emerging themes. As Smith et al. (2009) points out, “this level of analysis is not prescriptive and the analyst is encouraged to explore and innovate in terms of organising the analysis” (p. 96). I constructed files of transcript extracts where for each emergent theme, specific extracts for that theme were selected from different participants and pasted under the relevant theme. This assisted me in achieving internal consistency and relative broadness of each emerging theme. Step five involved moving to the next participant's transcript and repeating the process in step four. In keeping with IPA's idiographic nature, it was extremely important that I treated each participant's transcript on its own terms and I made sure as far as possible to bracket the ideas emerging from the analysis of the first case, while working on the second and so on.

The last step focused on identifying patterns across all cases. In order to achieve this, a master table of themes for all participants was created. This table allowed me to organise the themes and look for connections. During this step, themes were identified that were most potent and assisted in illuminate different cases.

## **Ethical considerations**

According to Wassenaar and Mamotte (2012, p. 3) “the most important aims of research ethics is to protect the welfare of research participants”. Qualitative interviews have the risk of causing subjective distress in respondents compared to other quantitative methods; therefore, it is important to highlight this in the risk/benefits section of the study (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The topic of cyberbullying and bullying is sensitive in nature and researchers need to be cautious in sensitive areas whereby participants have experienced the phenomenon. Thus I was aware and made sure during the interview that the respondent was comfortable with the level of exploration and discussion (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

The most appropriate method when dealing with sensitive topics is to prepare the respondents beforehand of the topic at hand, which was indicated in the information letter given to the parents/guardians and participants. This then results in a “favourable degree of directness on the part of respondents, who knew from the start what they were in for” (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 296). I followed the eight elements of ethical research proposed by Emanuel, Wendler, Killen and Grady (2004). The eight elements are discussed below:

### **Collaborative partnership.**

This element requires researchers to “ensure that the research they are conducting is developed in collaboration with the target community or population” (Wassenaar, 2006, as cited in Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 69). The research was driven by the need to gain knowledge around high school students perceptions and experiences with cyberbullying as there is a lack of qualitative research that explores these perceptions (Livingston & Haddon, 2008). In addition, cyberbullying is a worldwide phenomenon that has detrimental consequences on individuals and there is a lack of South African research about this topic (Smith, 2015).

### **Social value.**

According to Wassenaar and Mamotte (2012) the results of any research should give value to a society or specific community in society. The participating community (a high school on the South Coast, KwaZulu-Natal) may benefit from this study. The Headmaster of the school and the Department of Education, Umdoni Circuit Manager will be presented with a copy of the

study in order to gain more knowledge of high school students' perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying which could possibly result in the development of bullying and cyberbullying school policies or interventions.

### **Scientific validity.**

Wassenaar (2006, as cited in Terre Blanche et al.,2006) argues that the “methodology should be rigorous, appropriate, and systematic whether quantitative or qualitative designs are being used” (p. 70). Within the parameter of ‘validity’ within qualitative research, the design, sample, method and data analysis of this study is justifiable, and will answer the research question with valid answers.

### **Fair selection of participants.**

The studies population should be selected on the basis that the research question applies to them (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012). As mentioned previously, high school students were used as the studies sample. Posters were placed around the school to give all the students an opportunity to participate in the study.

### **Favourable risk/benefit ratio.**

It is important that researchers assess all potential risks, harms and ‘costs’ of the study to the participants. They should lower such risks in order for the risk and benefits of the study to be favourable (Wassenaar, 2006, as cited in Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Although the study included sensitive topics, and may have created potential risks of distress for participants, steps were taken to ensure that if a participant felt distressed or emotional after participating in the interview, a letter for the Applied Human Sciences Psychology Clinic at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (*see appendix I*) was provided.. The potential benefit of knowledge achieved from this research, can be said to be greater than the potential risk to participants.

### **Independent ethics review.**

The study followed ethical protocol by the Social Science and Humanities REC of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and obtained approval (*see appendix A*). In addition, permission

from the Headmaster of the high school in the South Coast, KwaZulu-Natal (*see appendix C*) as well as permission from the Department of Education, Umdoni Circuit Manager (*see appendix B*) was obtained prior to recruitment of participants and data collection.

### **Informed consent.**

Schenk & Williamson (2005) indicates that participants who are minors need to gain consent from their parents or legal guardians, thus the researcher provided information and consent forms for the parents/guardians of participants and participants themselves (*see appendix G and H*). The forms indicated that participation is anonymous and voluntary and a participant could withdraw during any stage of the interview. Anonymity of the interview would assist participants in being 'open' in discussing cyberbullying.

### **Ongoing respect for participants.**

During the study, all participants were treated with respect, both during and after the study. Data has been anonymous and raw data will be securely stored and destroyed after 5 years. In addition, the high school was not identified in order to minimise any potential discrimination and to protect the identity of the participants (Smith et al., 2009).

### **Assessing the Validity**

Although validity and reliability are crucial aspects of research, researchers indicate that qualitative research should be evaluated in "relation to criteria recognized as appropriate to it" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 179). Several guidelines are proposed for assessing reliability or validity in qualitative research. This study made use of Yardley's (2000) four principles in order to assess the validity and reliability of the study. The four principles are: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence and lastly impact and importance. In order to achieve *sensitivity to the context*, researchers should demonstrate an appreciation of the "interactional nature of data collection within the interview situation (Smith et al., 2009, p. 180), be able to make sense of each participants experiences during the analysis process, show sensitivity to the raw material of the study and lastly show an awareness of the existing literature.

As Smith et al. (2009) points out, “An IPA analysis is only as good as the data it is derived from and obtaining good data require close awareness of the interview process” (p. 180). Therefore, my role as a researcher was crucial, and I demonstrated this principle in the interviews by showing empathy and putting the participant at ease through introducing myself and building a good rapport at the start of each interview. Within the analysis process, I immersed myself in the data in order to make sense of how each participant made sense of their experience. Furthermore, in the Discussion chapter, a considerable number of verbatim extracts from the participants’ transcripts were used to support an argument being made. With regards to sensitivity to the raw material, this was achieved by taking care when collecting the data from participants and making analytic claims in the data. Lastly, relevant substantive literature was provided to help orientate the study and the findings were also related to relevant literature in the discussion.

*Commitment* is illustrated by the commitment of the researcher to display a degree of attentiveness to the participant during the interview and to show care during the analysis of the data. *Rigour* is achieved through the thoroughness of the study, for example the appropriateness of the sample selection and also the conduction of a good interview. The analysis of data needs to be sufficiently interpreted and an in-depth interpretation rather than a simple description is needed (Smith et al., 2009). Commitment was achieved as during the interviews, I was committed and invested to ensure that each participant was comfortable. In addition, I listened attentively to what each participant was saying.

In terms of *rigour*, it was important that the sample was selected carefully in order to match the research question and be reasonably homogenous. This was achieved as the required sample needed to be high school students as the aim was to understand *high school students’* perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying, thus rigour was achieved. The study was reasonably homogenous as the participants were equally represented in terms of grade, gender and race. In addition, in order to achieve rigour for the interview, the interview schedule was discussed with my supervisor and practised beforehand. During the interview, I attempted to be consistent in the probing, picking up on important cues from each participant and lastly to dig deeper to achieve a good quality of data. As mentioned previously, the analysis followed the six steps proposed by Smith et al. (2009). Throughout the analysis, I made sure that I was thorough in reading and re-reading and note taking. Furthermore, it was conducted in a thorough and systematic manner which included sufficient idiographic engagement. Thus rigour was achieved in terms of the completeness and thoroughness of the analysis process.

*Transparency* includes the detailed description of the stages of the research process such as the selection of participants, the construction of the interview schedule and the steps taken in the interview and lastly the data analysis steps (Smith et al., 2009). This principle was achieved as the stages of the research process were provided in the Methodology chapter, with headings being created that mentioned the selection of participants, the interview and the data analysis steps.

*Coherence* is achieved whereby the researcher places themselves in the reader's shoes and carefully reads the project drafts. The final project should present a coherent argument and illustrate the interconnectedness of the themes (Smith et al., 2009). Yardley (2000) also indicates that coherence refers to "the degree of fit between the research which has been done and the underlying theoretical assumptions of the approach being implemented" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 182). In terms of coherence, it was important that I read each project draft and attended supervision in order to achieve the above mentioned principle. The project has attempted to present a coherent argument and furthermore illustrated the interconnectedness of the themes. In addition, a few drafts were written of each chapter and were further assessed by my supervisor. The reader also plays a role in assessing the coherence of the study as they need to be convinced that the research has been conducted according to the principles of IPA. Smith et al. (2009) mention that "if evidence of these principles 'appears' within the write-up, it therefore acts as a testament to the complete research project" (p. 183). Therefore, in the discussion chapter, principles of IPA were present and it is thus safe to say that coherence was achieved.

Lastly, the *impact and importance* principle is associated with the idea that the research is seen as valid if it tells the reader something of importance or interest (Smith et al., 2009). This study achieved the above mentioned principle as the findings will contribute to the existing cyberbullying literature. Interesting conclusions have been drawn from the study (discussed in the conclusion) and it is anticipated that these findings may help inform South African cyberbullying literature and anti-cyberbullying programmes.

## **Summary**

This chapter outlined and described the research methodology used in conducting the study. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach was used to explore the experiences and perceptions of cyberbullying amongst high school students'. Details on this approach as well as the sampling and data collection methods were further discussed. The specific steps

used to analyse and interpret the data were highlighted. Lastly, the ethical guidelines as well as the assessment of validity and reliability were outlined. The following chapter will present both the results of the study and a discussion.

## Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

### Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings as well as a discussion of the emergent super-ordinate themes. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an understanding of each participants' experience and perception of cyberbullying, followed by the integration of literature and findings. In accordance with the IPA methodology, overarching super-ordinate themes and emergent sub-themes were obtained from the data and are presented in Table 3 below. The super-ordinate themes are: (1) Perceptions and Characteristics of Cyberbullying, (2) Parent Monitoring, (3) Cyberbullying vs. Traditional Bullying, (4) Perceived Cyber Bystander Motivation, (5) Perceived Cyber Bully Motivation and (6) Individual, Contextual and Societal Factors.

Table 3

*Summary of Emergent Super-ordinate and Sub-themes*

<b>Super-ordinate Theme</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
Perceptions and Characteristics of Cyberbullying	No escape: <i>"It's out there, once it's out, it's out and it's impossible to remove"</i> . Vulnerability at Night: <i>"It's always at night, that's what I have noticed, because that's when you are most vulnerable and you feel alone as well"</i> . Breaking down of victims: <i>"Cyberbullying is basically obviously through social media and using hurtful words against other people and ya just basically breaking them down"</i> .
Parent Monitoring	Lack of knowledge and Generation gap: <i>"I think the range of social media is too broad and parents are not up to date with it at all"</i> .

Misplaced trust: *“I think it is because parents trust them too much and believe what they say.”*

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Cyberbullying vs. Traditional Bullying

The activation of the bullying cycle: *“Cyberbullying is just the continuation of traditional bullying”.*

Wide audience & the fear of the ‘unknown’:  
*“It puts a fear in you and you want to shut down all your social media accounts because there are so many people that will see it”.*

The expectation of girls and the appealing nature of bullying online: *“Girls bully on the best place to bully other girls, on social media of course!”*

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Perceived Cyber Bystander Motivations

The enjoyment of a cyberbully-bystander: *“Like afterwards I felt much better and I laughed. It just made me feel better like I liked it”.*

The powerless passive cyber bystander: *“I feel like if a bystander just tells a bully online to stop, like I feel that they are not going to take it seriously and stop”.*

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Perceived Cyber Bully Motivation

Hiding behind a screen: *“People feel safe, they are safe guarded behind a screen”.*

Fewer consequences: *“In person you stand the risk of being seen doing it and being klapped”.*

Easiness of bullying online: *“It’s just easier to get away with it”.*

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Individual, Contextual and Societal Factors.

Individual and Contextual factors: *“It’s like all of my frustrations of the pain that I feel, everything that is inside me or things that*

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*are going on in my life, I just take it out on you”.*

Societal Expectations: *“A man is supposed to be tough you know, a man is supposed to be strong”/ “Snitches get stitches!”*

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### **Perceptions and Characteristics of Cyberbullying.**

The participants’ general perceptions and understandings of cyberbullying are an appropriate starting point in presenting the results, as they constitute a foundation upon which the participants’ perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying arise.

***No escape: “It’s out there, once it’s out, it’s out and it’s impossible to remove”.*** All participants viewed cyberbullying as something that a victim could not escape from, physically or emotionally. Crystal illustrated this point by reporting, “It’s out there, once it’s out, it’s out and it’s impossible to remove”. Once a victim is cyberbullied, they are continuously exposed to the cyberbullying as screen shots (photographs of the screen of a smart phone on which messages are being displayed) are now available. The participants explained that bystanders, victims or bullies could screen shot (and in so doing save an image of) the cyberbullying message. Kevin described the impact of screen shots, “Well like if you screenshot it’s always gonna be on your phone so you can go look at it whenever you want and it might make them feel worse”. This results in a victim never truly ‘escaping’ the cyberbullying, due to digital reminders of the event, and he or she could continue to be emotionally affected. Ayavuya explains:

“It remains there longer (screenshot) and it is just a reminder for you to see all the time or let’s say a meme that was posted last year, someone is going to go through your profile and like it and comment and everything is going to come back”.

For Ayavuya, the screenshots of her cyberbullying were a painful, constant reminder of the hurtful messages she was sent. Ayavuya further described:

“When people were just commenting on something that was a month old and I would ask myself, why are you going through my profile? Why? But someone has shared it and everyone saw it and someone replied saying mean stuff and I just ended up deleting Facebook”.

The above extract indicates that Ayavuya felt helpless and unable to do anything to stop people from cyberbullying her. It was as if she felt that she had done nothing wrong, yet people made her feel ‘trapped’ and unable to escape the hurtful words online. The only solution for her to escape the cyberbullying was to delete the social media platform on which the abuse was taking place (Facebook). This indicates the power of the inescapable nature of online victimisation as it results in victims feeling powerless and helpless to avoid the torment. Kendra, similarly, describes cyberbullying to be continuous:

“Cyberbullying is like continuous, continuous. Like you cannot punch a person everyday of your life, okay like you can but then it’s like...but with cyberbullying you can like pick at that person, you can do all you want every day, and no one like tells you hey you cannot say this, you can say whatever you want”.

She portrayed cyberbullying as being something that a victim cannot escape from as it can occur every day. Indirectly, she compared cyberbullying to traditional bullying (a bully cannot really ‘punch’ a victim every day). Her comparison highlighted the manner in which, due to cyberbullying having less immediate physical consequences for perpetrators, and being relatively simple to ‘do’ (little effort associated with using a cell phone or a computer), a victim cannot escape being cyberbullied. Crystal, a past victim of cyberbullying, explained:

“I think what’s worse about the internet is that the stuff is always there like the screenshots so if you are bullied online, it is almost impossible to get rid of it, but you know when it goes day by day when you have been bullied in real life, the next year some people won’t remember, some people move on, people leave but when it’s on social media it can always go round”.

The above indicates how technology can be seen as something negative, as it allows for a cyber victim to never escape the cyberbullying. For Crystal, she perceived that people will forget about the traditional bullying that a victim experiences, however she stated that cyberbullying is something that is always there. Crystal’s view of cyberbullying being something that a victim cannot escape from stemmed from her experience of an anonymous individual creating a fake profile of her on an online social media platform, as well as from girls sending hurtful messages to her on Instagram. She was constantly exposed to the cyberbullying, whether it was through social media, screenshots on her phone, or screenshots saved by cyber bystanders.

As mentioned previously, Bhengu perceived cyberbullying as both ‘indirect’ and ‘direct’ (which will be discussed in due course), therefore his perception of cyberbullying being something that a victim cannot escape from differs from the other participants:

“Like with cyberbullying, it’s obviously not physical its social and um...emotional bullying, so every time you scroll it’s something that hurts you”.

Bhengu’s perception stemmed from his feelings of poor self-esteem and insecurity. When he is on social media and saw boys who are “cut” (muscular) or “rich boys with fancy cars,” he internalised this as being a standard that he should reach, and - in comparison to it - felt inadequate and worthless. He felt that cyberbullying was something that was always on social media. Therefore, every time he went on social media, he felt it was something that he could not physically escape as this perceived form of cyberbullying was always there online. Thus, Bhengu felt like social media full stop was a kind of bullying platform, which indirectly shames everyone for not being ‘picture perfect.’

***Vulnerability at Night: “It’s always at night, that’s what I have noticed, because that’s when you are most vulnerable and you feel alone as well”.*** Cyberbullying appeared to occur mostly during the night, as this was when participants perceived victims to be most vulnerable. Three of the participants indicated that it could also occur during the afternoon after school and Mark illustrated this point by indicating that it occurs in the “afternoon, late and night; it depends”. For Mark, the occurrence of cyberbullying in the afternoon or night depended on whether students were involved in extracurricular activities in the afternoon or whether parents restricted the cell phone usage. Kendra, on the other hand, had a different perspective:

“Oh morning, day, night, afternoon all the time, I mean with phones it not like there is a limit that you can be on it, so you can do it 24 hours , um like mostly I would say at night though it’s weird I have noticed at night cos that’s when I feel like first of all, lots of people have depression at night, like you start to cry because of everything you have taken in during the day and then sometimes you lash out like I have seen people posting leave me alone, I am feeling alone on their stories, and then I am like oh shame you know what I mean, but it’s always at night, that’s what I have noticed, because that’s when you are most vulnerable and you feel alone as well”.

Kendra indicated that cyberbullying could occur at any time. However, night time was when she perceived it to occur most. Her perception stemmed from previously being diagnosed with depression and anxiety, as she mentioned:

“Yes I went to a Psychologist before like I was really depressed and I would not wish it upon anyone. The psychologist diagnosed me with depression and anxiety and I had to go on medication for it.”

Having suffered from depression and anxiety previously, her understanding of when cyberbullying occurs is unconsciously rooted in her vulnerability and attempt to portray herself as a ‘strong’ young lady. “Wearing a mask” during school has resulted in her feeling extremely depressed and vulnerable when she goes home. Therefore, her perception of night time is a sad and lonely one and she believed that this is when cyberbullying occurs as people are emotionally exhausted after taking everything ‘in’ during the day. Her understanding is thus rooted in her own depression and experience as she associated night time with vulnerability. Kendra’s understanding of cyberbullying is similar to that of Crystals. At first, Crystal indicated that “cyberbullying would happen at peak times when everyone is on their phone,” however she paused for a moment and mentioned:

“No wait...I actually would say majority of cyberbullying occurs when everyone finishes school and like especially at night time when everyone is sitting on their phones, and like you are all alone and stuff. That is when people get nasty comments on their pictures or things like that”.

As mentioned previously, Crystal experienced cyberbullying, and this may explain why she paused and changed her perception of when cyberbullying occurs. On further probing she revealed that she was cyberbullied during the night and she thus associated victims being “alone” and vulnerable during the night. This vulnerability, similar to Kendra’s view appears to make victims more susceptible to being cyberbullied. Victims are isolated and alone at home when they experience cyberbullying and this makes them more vulnerable. Bhengu also believed that cyberbullying occurs mostly at night:

“I think it is more at night because like you cannot do it during the day because you like not supposed to have your phone at school”.

Bhengu’s view corresponded with his position of being a Prefect at school. Cyberbullying occurring at night would fit into his experience as he adhered to the schools’ policy of no cell phones during the school day. It is evident from the above-mentioned excerpts that the participants’ perceptions of cyberbullying mostly occurring during night differed due

to their subjective and objective experiences of access to cell phones, and affect during different periods of the day.

***Breaking down of victims: “Cyberbullying is basically obviously through social media and using hurtful words against other people and ya just basically breaking them down”.*** It was evident that participants had a common ‘general’ understanding of cyberbullying. Although their perceptions differed to a certain extent, the participants all understood it as occurring through digital communication platforms and social media sites such as Whatsapp, Facebook and Instagram. A good example that illustrated the participants’ general understanding of cyberbullying is summed up by Kendra:

“Cyberbullying is basically obviously through social media and using hurtful words against other people and ya just breaking them down”.

Some participants extended this perception by indicating that cyberbullying included the comments and messages on social media written with the intent to hurt people, for instance, posting insults, publicly humiliating a victim and creating fake accounts. Matt described cyberbullying as, “just like insults but over social media” and Bhengu reported that it entailed, “messaging you to hurt you”. Similar to the latter view of Bhengu, Kevin reported that “it is comments that hurt you and it just brings the person down each time”. It appeared that participants all associated cyberbullying with something that ‘brings’ a victim emotionally down and hurts them.

Although the participants had a general understanding of the term, each participant constructed the phenomenon differently, either due to their personal experience or their observations. Kevin and Crystal’s perceptions of cyberbullying, for example, derived from their personal experiences of anonymous individuals creating fake accounts of them. Kevin’s understanding and experience of cyberbullying is encapsulated below:

“Um is that the one online? Um it can be dangerous cos sometimes you don’t know who it is, you can create fake accounts and put a bad name for other people and ya and creates a lot of problems where the people may think you are a bad person or ya do bad things”.

Kevin’s statement illustrates two points. Firstly, it reveals that he is not sure of the definition of cyberbullying as he asks, “Um is that the one online?” This reveals that he has a lack of knowledge of the term and his only understanding of it is linked to his own experience. For Kevin, he understood cyberbullying due to his experience of an anonymous person creating a fake account of him by cropping his face and putting it on a naked person’s body on Instagram. The cyber bullies were sending people messages from ‘Kevin’s’ Instagram account

saying “bad things and that like message me if you want nudes”. Kevin described this as having the ability to “put a bad name for other people”. This revealed the potential negative consequence of creating fake accounts.

Kevin said that online victimisation was “dangerous” as cyberbullying allows individuals to remain anonymous, therefore creating a fear in victims. His experience appeared to elicit emotions. During the interview, whilst he was describing his experience, the pace of his speech increased and his tone of voice changed. As someone who attempted to come across in the interview as being a ‘strong’ young man, it was clear that his main concern and feelings attached to his definition of cyberbullying were rooted in his fear of being perceived as gay by others. When Kevin indicated in the above quote that “people may think you are a bad person,” his fear was more around people viewing him as ‘gay’ as his perception of being ‘gay’ recurred throughout the interview and will be mentioned later.

Bhengu indicated that he understood cyberbullying to be either indirect and direct. Although he had not experienced cyberbullying before, it was evident that his understanding of indirect cyberbullying arose from his personal experience:

“Why am I so imperfect? When I want to get cut (muscular and lean) I look at guys on Instagram and I am like ahhh, those guys are so cut, why cannot I get cut, I will always be fat, you know. Like even when I am buff I am fat”.

The above extract illustrated Bhengu’s understanding of indirect cyberbullying. Growing up, Bhengu was bullied for being ‘fat.’ This bullying resulted in him having a poor self-esteem and he thus attempted to gym in order to lose weight. The meaning he attached to being bullied when he was younger contributed to how he perceived cyberbullying to be indirect. Bhengu believed that on social media when people post pictures of themselves, other people who look at these posts feel inadequate or worthless and he perceived this to be an indirect form of cyberbullying. This point is further illustrated:

“Yes in an indirect way as the guy doesn’t mean to, the guy who posts the picture, you know he is just showing that you know I look great, but the impact it has on other people you know, like the other guy might be like oh my god I need to work hard because no girl is going to love me”.

When Bhengu looked at Instagram pictures of well-built men or “men with fancy expensive cars” he felt worthless and “hurt inside and your (his) self-esteem takes a huge knock”. On the other hand, he understood direct cyberbullying to be “like intentionally messaging you to hurt you”. His understanding of direct cyberbullying was similar to that of the other participants ‘general’ understanding of the term. The addition of indirect

cyberbullying stemmed from his own personal experience of traditional bullying that filtered through to Instagram, where pictures online resulted in an increase of his poor self-esteem.

Although Kendra has not personally experienced cyberbullying, her understanding of the phenomena occurred through her observations:

“(breathes deeply) um...honestly it’s horrible. I have seen it myself where people have posted like graphic pictures of other people and even though it’s through the phone there are still words that you look at, it’s a constant reminder, it’s there. You can press delete but it’s still there and you have to look at it and be like oh my word, this is what they are saying”.

Although Kendra did not indicate that she had experienced cyberbullying, it was evident that she had attached specific emotions to her understanding. Before answering the question, she breathed in deeply, as if she was holding back tears. When she breathed out it felt as if she was holding in sadness and loneliness inside. After her ‘um’ she briefly wiped a tear from her eye; which revealed her emotions. It was evident throughout the interview that Kendra wanted to come across as being strong, and even reported that she “wears a mask” during the day as she does not want to be perceived as being weak. Her expressions, the atmosphere in the room and my intuition indicated that she did not want to discuss her cyberbullying experience as she did not want to be perceived as “weak”. For Kendra, although she did not discuss her experience, she still viewed cyberbullying as being something long lasting, where a person is constantly exposed to the hurtful messages or pain and subsequently unable to escape from it. Ayavuya understood cyberbullying to be:

“It’s all the comments people have on social media. It’s all the things when people say to you and some don’t even mean what they are saying, they are just fooling around”.

Ayavuya’s understanding of cyberbullying stems from her experience of being cyberbullied. She indicated that people would post bad comments on her Instagram pictures and she eventually deleted her account. Her experience left her feeling uncomfortable and paranoid that people were always laughing about her at school. In addition to the paranoia, she described cyberbullying breaking her down, “It broke me down. I used to break down if I saw comments by people...it was just sad”. Ayavuya felt extremely hurt when she read the comments by other girls, telling her she is ugly and making other hurtful comments. She further described that the bullies online were “just too harsh and it was making me (her) sick”. Her description revealed the intense hurt and meaning that she has attached to the term cyberbullying. For her, it carries a vast amount of pain and hurt, thus revealing the impact it

can have on an individual. Ayavuya's view of cyberbullying being unintentional is due to her sensitive personality and her deep desire to be loved. She has grown up in a somewhat dysfunctional family where she mentioned that "I (she) never see my mom and I hate my step dad. I just want my mom to give me attention and actually care for me!" Together with the previous pain of feeling unloved from her mother, and the subsequent cyberbullying event, she experienced a severe amount of pain. She further admitted that her cyberbullying experience was the result of her friends making jokes on her Instagram pictures, and although she knew they were joking, she was affected. This revealed that although her friends were joking, she took it personally. This was a result of her sensitive personality as well as the impact that simple 'jokes' online can have on an individual.

### **Discussion of Perceptions and Characteristics of Cyberbullying.**

It was evident that the participants' perceptions of cyberbullying varied and these differences stemmed from the context in which they occurred as well as their personal meanings attached to the term. The findings were consistent with literature as participants generally perceived cyberbullying to be defined as bullying through social media (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). Defining the phenomenon further, majority of the participants associated it with threatening, humiliation and hurtful comments on social media (O'Brien & Moules, 2010). Two participants mentioned their cyberbullying experience in which individuals created a fake account of them. This type of bullying is an increasing cyberbullying trend, "becoming more prominent among teenagers and it's having devastating effects on its victims" (Foster, 2018, para. 3). Social media sites that the participants did not mention included cell phone texting, MySpace, Twitter and YouTube (Brown et al., 2005). A reason for this may be the increase in popularity of the sites mentioned by the participants; Whatsapp, Facebook and Instagram. Kowalski et al. (2015) indicated that the increasing popularity of Whatsapp and Facebook has contributed to the prevalence of Cyberbullying. In addition, Facebook is a common media site that results in victims being more susceptible to cyberbullying (Donegan, 2012).

An interesting perception was that of Bhengu, as he defined cyberbullying as being either direct or indirect. These two labels are often found in traditional bullying where direct bullying is physical and verbal and indirect includes exclusion, spreading of rumours or stalking (Field, 2007). In cyberbullying research, there is minimal information regarding the difference between direct and indirect cyberbullying. Some researchers have suggested that cyberbullying is simply an indirect form of traditional bullying, whereby the bully does not

bully in a face-to-face interaction, but rather through technology (Beran & Li, 2005). From Bhengu's experience, he however differentiated the two terms. He understood direct cyberbullying to be "intentionally messaging you to hurt you" and indirect cyberbullying to occur when individuals post pictures online and subsequently this may make other people become jealous or experience feelings of inadequacies or worthlessness. More qualitative research is needed to further explore these perceived different types of cyberbullying.

The participants viewed cyberbullying as being "dangerous" and a means of 'no escape' (physically or emotionally). The perception of cyberbullying being something that an individual cannot escape from is similar to that of Dempsey et al. (2011). According to Dempsey et al. (2009), cyber bullies are able to invade the privacy of their victims on multiple online devices or social media sites, thus leaving few places for the victim to 'escape' from the bullying. Multiple devices however are not the only challenge that faces cyber victims as participants indicated that screenshots contribute to victims feeling as if they cannot escape. Crystal illustrated the negative consequence of a screenshot as, "It's out there. Once it's out, it's out and it's impossible to remove". She further mentioned, "I think what's worse about the internet is that the stuff is always there like the screenshots so if you are bullied online, it is almost impossible to get rid of it". This reveals the negative impact that the rise in technology is currently having on children and adolescents, as it has contributed to the detrimental effects of cyberbullying (Ruedy, 2008).

Cyberbullying can occur at any time of the day or night (Brown et al., 2006). The participants all perceived cyberbullying to occur at night, with three of them indicating that it occurs both afternoon and night (but mostly night). This was interesting as literature has suggested that due to the accessibility of cell phones, the phenomena can occur at any time (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). These results were more specific however and night time appeared to be a time where victims were more vulnerable and susceptible to cyberbullying, due to the isolated environment at night. For example, Winter and Leneway (2008) suggested that cyber victims are often cyberbullied in isolation and this results in the victim feeling more alone and helpless. During the night, victims are alone and do not have support of their peers. This loneliness and feelings of vulnerability all result in cyberbullying having a greater impact on the victims compared to traditional bullying.

The super-ordinate theme revealed that individuals make sense and interpret different phenomenon in different ways, depending on their own subjective and objective experience (Thornberg et al., 2012). It further highlighted the importance of IPA cyberbullying research as it provides informative and rich data. This is especially important to the field of research in

South Africa, as there is a minimal amount of cyberbullying literature available to understand the lived experiences of cyberbullying (Ang & Goh, 2010).

### **Parent Monitoring.**

It became evident that the participants perceived that parents do not supervise or monitor their children's' cell phone or social media usage. This super-ordinate theme revealed that, based on participant perceptions, the role of parents in supervising their children's' cell phone or social media usage plays an important role in the existence of cyberbullying.

***Lack of knowledge and Generation gap: "I think the range of social media is too broad and parents are not up to date with it at all".*** Some of the participants indicated that the reason that parents do not monitor their children's social media usage was due to the fact that they simply lack the knowledge of social media. Bhengu indicated that:

"I don't think parents understand like the impact that it has like if I had to post a picture of myself on Instagram and get 100 likes and someone else gets like 50 likes like parents don't understand the like thing".

Bhengu highlighted that parents have a lack of knowledge and therefore he believed this to be the reason why they do not monitor what their children do online. He illustrated his perception by using an example that parents will not understand the difference between receiving 100 likes or 50 likes for a picture on Instagram. For Bhengu, being a young male adolescent meant that it was important for someone to receive more 'likes' on a picture. Especially for him, as he has a low self-esteem and therefore he unconsciously determines his popularity or appearance on the basis of the amount of likes. This results in him placing emphasis on the importance of 'likes' to parents' lack of knowledge. Below illustrates the latter:

"Because like they are ignorant to the um...the age gap! Facebook came, I mean Instagram came out now and like the double tap and they would just be like press a heart and double tap the picture so like it's just like, not they aren't used to but it's just that they are not aware of what actually is happening, whereas with kids, because we understand oh okay it means that if this person gets so many likes it means that um.... they are actually liked by a lot of people".

After the "um...", Bhengu paused as if he hesitated to mention his perception of the importance of receiving 'likes.' In that moment it appeared that he made sense of this importance and therefore unconsciously became aware of just how important it was for him.

He was therefore able to perceive parents lack of knowledge being the reason why they did not monitor their children's' social media, however internally his deep desire to receive 'likes' continued to exist.

Kendra mentioned examples of parents' lack of knowledge by indicating that "it's smart what the kids do, they have apps that hide what they have!" Therefore, parents are not aware of technology advancements and have no knowledge of the increase of technology. Children are able to clear their activity history on their phones and if their parents search their phones they will not find anything. Kendra further indicated:

"Ya parents don't know everything. Parents only see the things on news where it's like girl gets kidnapped when talking to dudes, and I'm like no no no don't focus on that, focus on what your child is saying, like the comments, focus on that, like okay but the comments have you seen that!"

The above illustrated the seriousness of cyberbullying as Kendra believed parents only see what was on the news, however due to their lack of knowledge, they are not aware of what their son or daughter is doing on social media. Kendra had observed cyberbullying on social media and it was clear from the above extract that it shocked her what adolescents were saying online. Her indirect comparison of "girl gets kidnapped" on the news is compared to cyberbullying, which further illustrated the seriousness of the phenomenon as well as the important role that parents play. What was interesting was that Mark indicated that "I feel like younger parents might monitor their kids". This further illustrated that in the 'older' generation of parents, there is a perceived lack of knowledge and this contributes to the lack of monitoring of children. Parents who are younger in age may be more aware of technology and cyberbullying and therefore may supervise their children's cell phone activity more closely.

***Misplaced trust: "I think it is because parents trust them too much and believe what they say"***. In addition to the perceived generation gap and subsequent lack of knowledge, the participants believed that parents were too trustworthy of their children. For example, Ayavuya indicated that parents do not monitor their children's cell phone activity due to their trust:

"I think it is because their parents trust them too much and they believe what they say. Like they would say oh mom I am doing research but she is not doing research".

When probed further as to why she had made this observation, she mentioned, "Because I told my Uncle that I need data to do my research and he just gave it to me, but I was actually just on YouTube (*laughing*)". She therefore was able to make the connection between parents trusting their children too much because she had lied to her Uncle before. Her laughter at the

end of her comment revealed that she found it quite amusing and did not take her lie seriously. This may be reflective of how other children feel about hiding their social media activity from their parents. Kevin indirectly mentioned that trust is an important factor:

“I think they (parents) should, but most of them don’t because they don’t have the passwords to it, some parents don’t care like don’t think anything is going on, some don’t even know that they have Instagram and stuff like that”.

For Kevin, he believed that it was important that parents monitor their children’s activity, as he is a young adolescent male and has therefore witnessed what occurs on social media. Kendra illustrated the latter as she reported, “I mean I see the comments! I mean would your mom be impressed with the comment you are saying there? Noooo”. It is clearly evident that some parents place too much trust in their children and are not even aware what their children are doing on social media. Kendra highlighted the above mentioned ‘trust’ as she reported that “at the end of the day, a parent expects to trust their kid, and as a parent I would want to trust my kid”. She further mentioned:

“Your parents will believe it, they will say okay ya, they trust you, but they don’t know, like don’t trust me (*laughs*)! Look what I’m doing mom, like you won’t see it!”

It was evident from Kendra’s extract that parents are too trustworthy of their children and this trust subsequently results in poor parent monitoring. Her view stemmed from her observations of her friends negative behaviour online as she indicated that, “Like I see what my friends post online and say to other girls and it’s like mean stuff!” In addition, being an adolescent in today’s generation, there are many opportunities for children to hide things and lie to their parents. Parents are not aware of these available opportunities and subsequently they trust their children.

Mark was the only participant that indicated that his father is aware of technology and social media. In addition, he believed the reason that his parents do not monitor his cell phone activity was because they trusted him as he had, “Reached an age where they stopped caring, like not stopped caring but they like let me have my freedom, and do what I want”. Therefore, it would appear that age was a factor that contributed to a parent monitoring their child’s social media or cell phone usage as Mark is 18 years old. However, Ayavuya (15-years-old) contradicted this viewpoint by indicating that “My grandmother gives me my privacy and she doesn’t check my phone”. One can infer whether the factor of the age of a child contributes to their parents monitoring them by using Mark’s quote, where he reported that “I feel like it depends on the parents like my mom has no clue but my dad is clued up, so like it depends on

the parents”. Therefore, parents’ knowledge and awareness of their children’s online behaviour may be dependent on the parents themselves, irrelevant of their age.

### **Discussion of Parent Monitoring.**

Children and adolescents are aware that there is a generation gap in technology knowledge between themselves and their parents (Belsey, 2004). This emerged in the research as it was clear that the participants felt that parents lacked understanding and were too trustworthy of their children. Bhengu illustrated this by indicating, “I don’t think parents understand” and “because like they are ignorant to the um...the age gap!” This finding mirrors a Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety survey, which revealed that adolescents perceived parents as not having a general awareness of what happens on the internet (JSCCS, 2011). A second reason why parents may not monitor their children’s phone was due to the perceived high amount of trust they had for their children. Ayavuya for example mentioned, “I think it is because their parents trust them too much”. The available cyberbullying literature however rarely mentions that parents *trust* plays a role. Thus, this finding is significant and further research is needed.

A concern raised in cyberbullying literature is that there is a lack of parent monitoring. This lack of monitoring is contributing to cyberbullying victimisation and the results from this study concur with the literature (Hurtzell & Payne, 2012). Due to the fact that cyberbullying takes place in the home environment, it is difficult for school policies to control this type of bullying. This is why parent supervision plays a critical role in intervening and preventing cyberbullying as it is a protective factor (Mesch, 2009). Although there is limited research on the positive effects of cyberbullying and parent monitoring, the few that are available have shown promising results. These studies have shown that parents who monitored their children’s online activity, minimised the chances of their children falling victim to cyberbullying or participating in bullying behaviour (Rosen et al., 2008; Spears et al., 2005).

### **Cyberbullying vs. Traditional Bullying.**

Although both types of bullying can be somewhat differentiated, a sub-theme that emerged was the perceived cyclical relationship between traditional bullying and cyberbullying, whereby a particular type of bullying activated the cycle of bullying. It further emerged that participants perceived two characteristics that separated cyberbullying and traditional bullying; the difference in gender and the impact of the wider audience in cyberbullying.

*The activation of the bullying cycle: “Cyberbullying is just the continuation of traditional bullying”.* Three participants indicated that both cyberbullying and traditional bullying were a continuation of each type of bullying (in some cases cyberbullying would begin, followed by traditional bullying and vice versa). For example, Crystal mentioned that, “Yes like social media as well cos obviously bullies at school will find you on your social media”. Thus, depending on the type of bullying (traditional or cyber), the activation of the bullying cycle occurs and it triggers a continuation of bullying. Crystals quote above illustrated that she perceived traditional bullying at school to activate the occurrence of cyberbullying at home. Bhengu is of a similar view that traditional bullying occurs first, followed by cyberbullying:

“Like directly, if a direct bullying, like something has to have happened before, like physically like maybe it’s just cyberbullying is just the continuation of traditional bullying so if you are getting bullied at school and the person has your number then I am going to get you at school tomorrow, it’s just continuous, like you walk out of the school gate and then someone is still bullying you at home, even though they are not there”.

Bhengu believed that in order for cyberbullying to occur, some sort of physical traditional bullying at school needs to first take place. Victims of traditional bullying may perceive that they are ‘safe’ once they walk out the school gates. However, Bhengu associated the existence of the continuation of bullying due to the accessibility that bullies have in order to bully continuously online. Once a victim has been bullied at school, a bully can find their victim online. However, the only reason for the occurrence of cyberbullying is due to the ‘activation’ of the bullying cycle which occurred because of traditional bullying. This results in the victim being unable to escape at home, a place where they should feel safe and free from bullying. Kendra’s viewpoint on the other hand differed from Bhengu and Crystal as she indicated the following:

“Ya, I have snapped like I shouted at them cos like I had this one girl and she like kept sending me messages on the phone like ya you taking my man and rude name calling and the thing is with this generation is like everyone thinks you are taking their man or you taking their friend like it’s like not the case, and then she was telling me I was taking her man and I am like this and this and then she came up to me at school and she’s like yoh I am gonna hit you and nah nah nah nah so I was like ahhhh I am gonna hit you back, and then I like snapped”.

The above illustrated Kendra's experience of a girl cyberbullying her on social media. When Kendra attended school, the cyber bully started antagonising and threatening her and a fight broke out. Kendra's experience revealed that cyberbullying may lead to traditional bullying. She further mentioned:

“Ya I remember when we were in class and these 2 girls had a fight over the phone and then in class they snapped, she reached the snapping stage and then she went to the girl and pulled her hair down and like tried to throttle her on the ground”.

Kendra perceived cyberbullying to activate the bullying cycle and allow for traditional bullying to occur at school. She mentioned that her cyberbullying experience made her feel “angry” and “frustrated”. It may be possible that the distance in cyberbullying contributed to her feelings of frustration, as she may have felt that she could not physically stand up for herself (as it was through the phone). Her frustration therefore built up and when she was approached by the cyber bully at school, she “snapped”. Her experience and her observation of cyberbullying both resulted in her perception that cyberbullying activates the bullying cycle.

***Wide audience and the fear of the ‘unknown’: “It puts a fear in you and you want to shut down all your social media accounts because there are so many people that will see it”.*** A sub theme that emerged as a distinct feature that differentiated cyberbullying and traditional bullying was that of the wider audience. It was clear that the participants felt that the wider audience in cyberbullying had a far greater impact on the cyber victim compared to traditional bullying. Ayavuya for example reported that:

“A cyber bystander is worse. See in some social networks, you don't see the people who have seen it, and you might think okay maybe these are the only ones who have seen it and it doesn't affect you that much, but when you see on other social network sites, you think who else has seen this, this is so bad”.

For Ayavuya, she associated the audience in cyberbullying to be worse. Due to the wider audience on social media sites, more bystanders are able to view the cyberbullying. Therefore, she believed that this resulted in the impact being worse as you are not aware of how many people viewed the bullying. With traditional bullying (whether verbal or physical), a victim is more aware of the audience that observes it. Her perception may unconsciously stem from her experience of cyberbullying as she was left feeling vulnerable and paranoid as she did not know who had seen the hurtful messages online. Ayavuya further went on to say that “more people see it happening. More people can join the bullies and it can be more bad”. Therefore, the wider audience creates more opportunities for bystanders to join the cyberbullying. It

further results in bystanders being unable to take control and stop the cyberbullying compared to traditional bullying. Ayavuya's view of the wider audience is further illustrated by Kevin, who mentioned:

“Cos like if you are in the school, 400 people, maybe like 300 people watch but on Facebook or Instagram you have like thousands of people who can see it, so ya there would be more people on the net that could see it”.

This 'fear' of not knowing who had seen the cyberbullying due to the wider audience can be associated to Kevin's experience of cyberbullying. Kevin became concerned about who had seen the cyberbullying or “what people would think”. However, he (as mentioned previously) was more concerned about people thinking he was gay. Therefore, Kevin was concerned about who witnessed the cyberbullying and would assume he was gay. Not knowing who witnessed the victimisation made him worry that there would be a vast amount of people perceiving him to be gay, and he would not know who they were. Crystal had a similar perception to Kevin as she mentioned, “Obviously it puts a fear in you and you want to shut down all your social media accounts because there are so many people that will see it”. From Kevin and Crystal's experience, it was clear that the wide audience in cyberbullying produces a 'fear' because of the 'unknown.' The 'unknown' being that of who has witnessed the cyberbullying and furthermore the fear of what would people think of them.

For Bhengu however, he believed that it was easier to stop traditional bullying as it was normally one or more individuals bullying, whereas with cyberbullying there were multiple bullies or bystanders (wider audience) that may join:

“Like to stop bullying, you have to bully, not like bully bully but like if a person is being physically bullied and stuff like that, it's easier to go up to the bully and tell him hey listen, stop what you are doing or I am going to give you your own medicine and then that's when people back off, but with cyberbullying like there are too many people online and you cannot like face them and tune them to stop”.

Bhengu indicated that he had previously stopped two boys physically bullying another boy, however they only backed off because according to Bhengu, they “were like, okay cool he is in matric you know, he is a prefect”. Therefore, for him, through his high social status in school, it was easier for him to stop the bullying one on one. However, he believed that on social media there are too many people to stop. Maybe unconsciously, he perceived his 'power' and school authority to be invisible on social media (similar to how bullies 'hide' behind a screen) and therefore this resulted in Bhengu feeling powerless to stop the bullying.

***The expectation of girls and the appealing nature of bullying online: “Girls bully on the best place to bully other girls, on social media of course!”*** It emerged that gender played a significant role in differentiating between cyberbullying and traditional bullying. All the participants indicated that they perceived girls to participate in cyberbullying more and boys to participate in traditional bullying (physical) more. This general perception is illustrated by Ayavuya, “Girls (cyberbully more). They are on social media more, girls talk more, girls laugh at each other more and they say mean stuff more and they just gossip more than boys”. Ayavuya’s perception stemmed from her cyberbullying experience as she indicated that it was girls who bullied her, “It was girls who bullied me like they were just so harsh and telling me how ugly I am, like it was just easier for them to say it online than to my face”. Although all the participants indicated gender differences, what was interesting was that the three girl participants felt strongly about girls participating in cyberbullying. This further demonstrated that girls are more involved in cyberbullying, as the female participants had either experienced or observed this gender difference personally. Below illustrates Kendra’s perception of gender, when she was asked which gender cyber bullies more:

“Girls, because girls expect you to act and look a certain way you know what I mean, and if some girls don’t like the way you look or the way you acting they will speak, they will speak their minds on social media. Boys, they are not as worried what’s going on, they are more like interact with their friends”.

Kendra’s perception of girls cyberbullying more stemmed from her bullying experience growing up, where she described always feeling as if she had to wear the most expensive clothes or “keep up the trends like wear expensive Nike shoes like everyone else” in order to avoid being bullied. In the above extract she mentioned, “You know what I mean”. These words were used as I am a female and therefore she expected me to be aware of the pressure girls place on each other. With cyberbullying being a platform for bullying to take place that is ‘easier’ and anonymous, Kendra perceived that girls will bully more online as there is an expectation placed on girls’ appearance, therefore as Ayavuya mentioned “girls bully on the best place to bully other girls, on social media of course!” Crystal further highlighted this perception:

“There is definitely like girls feel this pressure to have this image, like just a facade that girls have to put up on their social media and I feel that like the next girl who is jealous of them is out to ruin that whether it is the true image or not”.

On social media, it appears that there is an expectation that girls need to meet due to the pressure that society places on girls. The pressure of having to have a ‘perfect’ appearance

results in girls trying to put on a 'perfect mask' or profile online. If girls do not live up to this expectation, they will become victims of cyberbullying. On the other hand, if girls are jealous of what they see online, they will cyberbully. Crystal's perception stemmed from her experience of cyberbullying and she believed that she was targeted as, "I (she) really think that whoever bullied me was just jealous of the selfies I posted online so they tried to get back at me!" Therefore, for Crystal, girls cyber bully more because of the expectation of the 'perfect' appearance for girl's online as well as the jealousy between them.

When asked whether Crystal thinks boys are cyberbullied, she replied, "I think a lot less cos boys are more physical from what I've seen". Kevin was of a similar view as he reported that, "I think boys are more physical like I have seen some hectic fights break out, like boys just have a natural fight in them". As mentioned previously, Kevin experienced cyberbullying. However, when asked what gender he believed the cyber bully to be, he indicated, "I think it was a girl, like I don't know the way they spoke to other guys online and it just sounded like a girl". This further demonstrated the perception that girls participate in cyberbullying more. He further reported that girls are more likely to cyberbully as "like girls don't really physically hurt someone like they will keep making comments about each other or something". For Mark, his perception of the gender differences stemmed from his observation of boys physically bullying others:

"There is for example people in previous situations where bullying has gotten borderline torturous where cos of stupid things that have been done and it's not like normal bullying like normal bullying will be what I have noticed like a couple punches but there has been situations where I have seen groups of guys gang up on 1 guy and trap them somewhere and physically, borderline torture them because of stuff that's gone down, where as I feel like girls won't do something like that, it's more on social media like saying insults, but guys, depending on the guy can lash out physically".

Mark's experience revealed the seriousness of traditional bullying amongst boys, as he even associated it with being "borderline torturous". Compared to boys, he indicated that girls are more likely to make insults on social media as, "Girls are less likely to lash out physically like they just make insults on social media".

## **Discussion of Cyberbullying vs. Traditional Bullying.**

From the review of the traditional bullying and cyberbullying literature, it was clear that the two forms of bullying have certain elements in common, but also elements that differentiate the two. In order to understand cyberbullying, it was important to pay attention to the distinctive features of this type of behaviour which are not present in traditional face-to-face bullying (Kowalski et al., 2008). The super-ordinate theme highlighted the participants perceived similarities and differences between cyberbullying and traditional bullying. Some of the findings were consistent with the literature, however one perception in particular was interesting. Beran and Li (2005) mention that an individual who experiences bullying at school may be at risk of subsequently experiencing cyberbullying. However, Hinduja and Patchin (2014) argue that it is difficult to determine whether traditional bullying occurs before cyberbullying or vice versa. Although majority of the participants perceived a bullying event at school to activate cyberbullying (which is consistent with literature by Cassidy et al., 2009), Kendra mentioned two separate occasions that contributed to her belief that cyberbullying occurs first. To my knowledge, there are no findings that have found this perception, and therefore it raises some intriguing follow up questions for further research.

Within Bronfenbrenner's Microsystem, individual characteristics such as age, gender and race can be predictors of bullying behaviour (Espelage et al., 2016; Nansel et al., 2001). The findings of this research may contribute to identifying the role of gender in cyberbullying and bullying. Research has shown that cyberbullying amongst gender varies (Donegan, 2012). However, Aricak et al. (2009) and Beran and Li (2005) found no association. Findings from this research contradicted Aricak et al. (2009) and Beran and Li's (2005) findings as the participants perceived girls to be more involved in cyberbullying and boys to participate more in traditional bullying.

An interesting point to highlight was that the study consisted of three girls and three boys, and all six participants had similar perceptions. This revealed that both genders had similar views and perceptions. These findings were thus consistent with research by Griezel et al., (2012) and Pereira et al. (2004). Therefore, these results have further maintained the belief that direct aggression and violence is more "prototypical of the male gender," while indirect aggression such as cyberbullying is more prototypical of females (Navarro, 2016, p. 36). Reasons for this finding may stem from cultural beliefs (which will be discussed further) that girls 'gossip' more as Ayavuya mentioned, "They are on social media more, girls talk more, girls laugh at each other more and they say mean stuff more and they just gossip more than

boys”. In addition, another perceived cultural belief is that there is an expectation for girls to maintain a certain image, “like just a facade that girls have to put on their social media” as highlighted by Crystal. Thus, this expectation contributes to the role that females play in cyberbullying.

Bauman (2010) argued that the wider audience on social media and subsequent greater humiliation contributes to the negative consequences of cyberbullying compared to bullying. The findings thus suggest and are consistent with literature that unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying has a wider audience (Holladay, 2010). The participants perceived cyber bystanders to be worse, due to the fact that the victim is not aware of who has seen the cyberbullying, as Ayavuya mentioned, “In some social networks, you don’t see the people who have seen it”. In addition, the participants perceived that due to the wider audience, bystanders on social media do not have the power to stop cyberbullying as Bhengu mentioned, “With cyberbullying like there are too many people online and you cannot like face them and tune them to stop”. In conclusion, the results revealed that the wider audience in cyberbullying has an impact on the emotional consequences for a victim as well as the perception that a cyber bystander cannot stop the cyberbullying.

### **Perceived Cyber Bystander Motivations.**

The above-mentioned super-ordinate theme encapsulates the participants’ perceptions for a cyber bystander either joining the cyberbullying (active cyber bystander) or refraining from joining (passive cyber bystander). It was clear (and alarming) that the participants found more reasons to not actively stand up against the cyberbullying and simply remain passive.

***The enjoyment of a cyberbully-bystander: “Like afterwards I felt much better and I laughed. It just made me feel better like I liked it”.*** Ayavuya indicated that there are three reasons why a bystander is motivated to join the cyberbully:

“Um, it’s because maybe they are scared of being cyberbullied, or it is because they do not like the victim or they have something against the victim. Then obviously you are going to join the bully because you like seeing the victim in pain or hurt or something like that”.

She believed that a bystander joined the cyberbullying as either they were scared of becoming a victim themselves, they simply did not like the victim or they had something against them. What was interesting in her view of active bystanders was the comment about the pleasure that is gained, as she further indicated, “Well, it makes you feel better (*laughs*)!

(joining the bully)". Her comment about the enjoyment a person experiences stems from when she bullied a girl by calling her mean names. Ayavuya mentioned the feelings she experienced:

"But when I was talking to her, it like removed this huge burden from me, because I just used to look at her and say nothing else and just kept quiet and let her do things and I had had enough. Like afterwards I felt much better and I laughed. It just made me feel better like I liked it".

Her experience of being a bully resulted in feeling 'free' and she later labelled this as feeling "relieved". Bhengu on the other hand labelled this as "feeling satisfaction". Her current family problems have had an impact and have caused her to feel unloved, angry and frustrated as she reported that, "Like I just don't understand why my mom never visits or calls me, it just hurts". Therefore, when she bullied a girl, she instantly felt all her frustrations fading away and she felt pleasure in watching someone else be hurt. Not only had her family problems contributed this enjoyment, but perhaps the fact that she was cyberbullied may have resulted in her unconsciously wanting retaliation by making innocent victims experience the pain she felt. Kendra on the other hand believed that bystanders joined the cyber bully in order to make themselves appear 'cool':

"It's just to be like hey guys look what I got you know what I mean, look what I can do. It's that, to show what you got and it's also to be to other people like I am this cool and I can do this, so watch out".

The above illustrated that people will join the bully in order to appear 'powerful' to others. This results in the bully bystander feeling 'superior' to others. In addition, the powerfulness creates a type of fear in their victims which results in enjoyment and pleasure. For Kendra however, she did not understand why someone would join the bully:

"I don't know like why do we comment horrible things on pictures like that's what I don't understand. Why do we comment on pictures...cos maybe we like it... like maybe that could be the case I don't know? I really don't know what we do that. Also, just to show a cool comment like ya cool bru, look what I am gonna put on there you know what I mean".

Kendra did not understand what would motivate a bystander to join the bully. After pausing and thinking about a motivation she shrugged and indicated, "Cos maybe we like it". After she made the comment, the pause and observed embarrassment in the interview may be explained by Mark:

“Like I feel when people watch someone get beaten they laugh, then they are going to get judged themselves where as if they are online then no one knows who they are or what they doing like they could enjoy it and not acknowledge that they are enjoying it”.

This revealed that bystanders are afraid of being judged if they are seen to laugh at the victim or appear to enjoy the bullying. Therefore, on social media, a bystander may find it easier to join a bully as they won't get judged (be embarrassed) by the enjoyment they experience. In addition, due to anonymity in cyberbullying, a bully bystander may remain anonymous and subsequently will not get judged by peers for joining the bullying. For Mark, he believed that through social media, cyberbullying is “easier for other people to join in without feeling like they have joined in, if that makes sense”. He extended this perception of bystanders on social media indirectly becoming bully bystanders as:

“Ya it's not like, like I feel that some people have a problem with saying insults to someone's face but when they see it online they are not necessarily joining in but they are not really stopping it, they are not complaining about it like they kind of are promoting it”.

People on social media who witness cyberbullying but don't report it or stand up for the victim in Mark's eyes are indirectly a bully bystander. His perception stemmed from his good morals and he mentioned a time that he attempted to stand up to a bully (traditional bullying). Thus, he perceived people who do not assist victims online to join bullies themselves as they are not doing the correct 'moral' thing. Mark was the only participant that showed some level of empathy and morals regarding bullying and cyberbullying, however when asked if he would stop cyberbullying himself, he said, “Well like it's not my responsibility, it's the victims”. Although it was evident that Mark had morals, he was adopting an avoidant bystander role as he was denying personal responsibility by arguing that it is not his responsibility to intervene.

***The powerless passive cyber bystander: “I feel like if a bystander just tells a bully online to stop, like I feel that they are not going to take it seriously and stop”.*** The participants appeared to find several reasons as to why a cyber bystander would remain passive and not actively intervene. Majority of the participants indicated that cyber bystanders did not have the power to stop cyberbullying. This was highlighted by Kendra:

“(pauses) that one I will have to think of... I don't think so. No I don't actually cos it can happen again again and again”.

The above quote illustrated that due to the ‘fake’ or ‘unreal’ nature of technology and social media, cyber bystanders are perceived to not have the power to intervene and thus remain passive. Bhengu believed the following to be the reason why cyber bystanders remained passive:

“I think like you don’t feel like it’s your place cos it’s over the phone, you don’t feel like it’s your place cos like let’s be real, you cannot just tell the guy hey please stop posting pictures of yourself, you know. You can message a person like please stop talking to a person like this but it’s hard because you know you are not involved, whereas where there is a fight at school, you can come in and step in for them and say like back off dude, but over the phone it’s kind of hard to tell the person back off cos once they back off they are like okay cool I backed off, cos it’s easy to lie on social media. Like you message this guy and say okay I backed off but then as soon as you send the message and read it, you go back to this guy and he’s carried on bullying”.

Bhengu highlighted the different impact between a cyber bystander and a traditional (bullying) bystander. It was evident that he believed that a bystander in traditional bullying has the ability to stop the bullying. However, with cyberbullying there are a few reasons as to why a bystander does not intervene. Due to the fact that cyberbullying occurs over the phone (where deceit on social media also occurs), he perceived that a cyber bystander won’t be active in intervening as they may perceive it not to be their place. The reason for his perceived difference in the impact may stem from his role of being a prefect, a matric and in the first team rugby (social hierarchy).

It was evident throughout the interview that Bhengu believed that being the three above mentioned roles resulted in him being ‘powerful’ and ‘untouchable’ from the bullies. For example, he described a time where he told bullies to stop bullying and the only reason they stopped was because, “When you are in matric like that’s when people back off cos they are like okay cool he is in matric you know, he is a prefect”. Therefore, for Bhengu, this perceived ‘power’ resulted in him believing a traditional bully bystander can stop the bullying. Perhaps on social media, there is no ‘power’ that he experiences in person, and therefore unconsciously he feels powerless; thus he indicated, “Like let’s be real, you cannot just tell the guy hey please stop posting pictures”. Furthermore, it was clear that he perceived a cyber bystander to feel helpless as he indicated that “there was nothing they can do” (due to the nature of cyberbullying) and therefore are motivated to remain passive. Kevin had a similar view of the cyber bystander feeling helpless:

“I think they might not know what to do like people tuning over the phone like you cannot tell them to stop or shut their voices off so they are just going to keep going or whatever but you can only stop them if they are fighting or hitting each other”.

Kevin also perceived that only a bystander in traditional bullying had the ability to stop it. His perception illustrated that bystanders on social media may not be taken seriously as there is a lack of ‘physical’ distance. It also highlights the idea that cyber bystanders are ‘helpless’ as they do not know what they can do to intervene as the bullying is occurring on cell phones. Similar to Bhengu’s view, he believed that a cyber bystander cannot do much over the phone and therefore they remain passive. Crystal also perceived a cyber bystander to not have the ability to stop the bullying as she indicated that, “I feel like if a bystander just tells a bully online to stop, like I feel that they are not going to take it seriously and stop”. Her view revealed that in order for a bystander to make a difference, they need to be physically present in order for a bully to take whatever the bystander says seriously. A cyber bystander may not stand up to the cyberbully, as it is evident through the participant’s perceptions that cyber bystanders feel that they cannot make a difference. Crystal demonstrated this point when she was asked whether she would stand up for a friend who was getting cyberbullied:

“I wouldn’t necessarily get involved but I would do something like talk to my friend on the side and privately and report the account that I saw was bullying cos if you report the account they do shut them down if you giving them valid reasons”.

Unconsciously and consciously, Crystal believed that a cyber bystander cannot make a difference. This was revealed when she indicated that she would not stand up for her friend online. Instead however, she would rather contact them privately or report the account. On the other hand, she indicated that if a friend was getting physically bullied that she would stand up for them. This highlighted the perception of cyber bystander’s ability to stop bullying, which contributes to why a cyber bystander is motivated to remain passive. Mark had a different perception as to why a cyber bystander is motivated to remain passive as he believes that the victim themselves is the one who is in control:

“Like on Whatsapp you can block a contact, on Instagram and Facebook you can unfriend someone”.

Mark did not understand cyberbullying as he felt that on social media, it was the victim who was allowing people to cyberbully them. He believed that they have the power to stop it and it was no one else's problem as they "are not doing everything they could do to stop it". He therefore believed that a cyber bystander should remain passive as it's not their responsibility, but it rather falls upon the victim themselves.

### **Discussion of Perceived Cyber Bystander Motivation.**

Research has revealed that cyberbullying mostly occurs in the presence of bystanders (Leduc et al., 2018). Given this information, it was interesting to observe that participants found more reasons to remain a passive cyber bystander than to take appropriate action. It was evident that there was a type of moral disengagement when it came to the cyber bystander's role, as their passive behaviour was explained by specific factors (Leduc et al., 2018). These included the belief that it was not their place to take action, perceived online helplessness and not being taken seriously due to the overall 'unreality' of cyberspace. Defending a victim online was viewed as being relatively ineffective, as Bhengu suggested, "You don't feel like it's your place cos it's over the phone...over the phone its kinds of hard to tell the person back off" and "let's be real, you cannot just tell the guy hey please stop". These findings were consistent to literature and it highlighted the perception that due to the lack of physical distance, a cyber bystander remained passive as it was perceived that taking action would be ineffective (Davis & Davis, 2007). This may also have been a result of being an avoidant bystander as suggested by Twemlow et al., (2004). It was clear that the participants mentalising ability was preserved by denial and therefore they indirectly contributed to the victimisation by denial of personal responsibility.

Studies have found that individuals with empathy have a higher chance of actively intervening in cyberbullying (Freis & Gurung, 2013). These findings however did not indicate that the participants perceived an individual's personality to contribute to actively intervening or not. Rather, social media is viewed as an unreal "virtual" world and this contributes to a cyber bystander's response to cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). This perception clearly had an impact on the perceived motivations to remain passive as technology lacks a feel of 'realness' and this results in bystanders not intervening.

An interesting finding was that of Mark, who perceived that some cyber bystanders remained passive as they believed that it was in fact the victims themselves that had the power to stop the cyberbullying, "Like on Whatsapp you can block a contact, on Instagram and

Facebook you can unfriend someone”. Due to the nature of technology, social media allows individuals to decide who they have on their social media accounts. This may be another reason as to why some cyber bystanders remain passive, as they believe that it’s not their place as the victim has the power to stop the cyberbullying. Mark’s view of a cyber victim being able to defend himself highlights the difference between cyberbullying victims and traditional bullying victims as Olweus and Limber (1999) argued that traditional bullying victims are unable to defend themselves. In contrast however, according to Huang and Chou (2010), the cyberbullying victim has the ability to indirectly ‘fight back’, which is similar to Mark’s perception.

What was alarming was that participants believed that cyber bystanders did not have the power to stop cyberbullying and this was why they remained passive (Leduc et al., 2018). This is concerning as Bauman et al. (2013) argued that “bystanders represent a critical group to consider in prevention and intervention strategies” (p. 67). This reveals that most cyber bystanders have adopted the abdicating bystander role by abdicating responsibility due to the perceived feelings of inadequacies. Although studies have found the role of friendship to be reason why a bystander will actively intervene, the results from this study indicate that friendship does not make a difference. This was illustrated by Crystal who indicated that she would not actively stand up for her friend online (Bellmore et al., 2012; Thornberg et al., 2012.) Therefore, one can conclude that the results of this study reveal that the role of the helpful (altruistic) bystander as proposed by Twemlow et al. (2004) has a non-existent role in cyberbullying.

The perceived motivators for a cyber bystander to participate in cyberbullying included fear of retaliation, gaining power and the anonymous nature of social media. A factor that has the ability to alter the dynamics of cyberbullying is the cyber bystander as they have an influence on the victim-bully balance (Twemlow, 1996). However, due to the wide audience of social media, cyber bystanders who witness the cyberbullying online and actively do nothing about it are in fact cyber-bully-bystanders themselves. For example, Mark indicated, “Like I feel that some people have a problem with saying insults to someone’s face but when they see it online they are not necessarily joining in but they are not really stopping it, they are not complaining about it like they kind of are promoting it”. This finding however differed from that of Huang and Chou’s (2010) study as they proposed that a cyber bystander is only considered a cyber-bully-bystander if they forward the cyberbullying messages or posts.

Twemlow et al. (2004) argued that when a bystander is not able to experience a sense of connection to other people, they may feel guilt or shame. This results in engaging in negative

bystander behaviour. This mirrored Ayavuya's experience as she had a deep desire to be loved, however when this desire was not met, her mentalisation and empathy level lowered and she subsequently participated in cyberbullying (Frith & Frith, 2003). Another motivation to become a cyber bully (aggressive) bystander was due to anonymity. This perceived anonymity allowed for disinhibition and participants perceived it to be a reason to join the cyber bully and they could thus avoid being judged socially because of their negative bystander behaviour (Olenik-Shemesh, Heiman & Eden, 2013). As mentioned previously, mentalisation appeared to play a crucial role in cyber bystanders' participation in cyberbullying.

Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco (2004) argued that individuals define themselves through social feedback from interactions with others. Over time, the social feedback and interactions contribute to the way in which the individual behaves and define themselves. This was illustrated by Mark, who mentioned that, "No one knows who they are or what they are doing like they could enjoy it and not acknowledge that they are enjoying it." In addition, as pointed out by the participants, the cyber-bully-bystanders will not be judged for their negative online behaviour, as they will remain anonymous. Subsequently, their peers will not be able to 'physically' witness the cyber bystanders' enjoyment experienced from cyberbullying. This results in a loss of mentalisation as they are not being judged or receiving negative social feedback (as they are anonymous). Therefore, due to the lack of distance and anonymity of cyberbullying, they are able to join the cyberbully and as Fonagy et al. (2004) argues, they become "dehumanized" (p. 5).

One of the main motivators was the enjoyment gained by joining the cyber bully. Ayavuya mentioned, "Obviously you are going to join the bully cos you like seeing the victim in pain or hurt or something like that". According to Twemlow et al. (2004), the individual's ability to mentalise at the previous mentioned point collapses and their empathy level decreases. Ayavuya reported that she enjoyed seeing the victim in pain, as she experienced a significant amount of anger and frustration prior to the bullying. She associated these feelings as a result of her dysfunctional family, lack of support and falling victim to cyberbullying. When she participated in bullying she felt a sense of 'relief' and 'pleasure' as the build-up of her frustrations were indirectly 'released.' Scapegoating therefore offered a means of destructive satisfaction of her basic needs and Ayavuya's pleasure resulted in bullying others. By bullying her victims, she was able to elevate herself and be 'satisfied.' According to Staub (2003), scapegoating can reduce the cyber bystanders feeling of responsibility for problems. Therefore, due to her unstable home environment and poor relationships with her mother, it allowed her to be 'free' and not think about her current problems. She did not take

responsibility for being a bully as she appeared to blame her previous experience of bullying and current family problems. Thus, this finding revealed that the enjoyment a cyber bully bystander receives, may be a result of retaliation or factors within the microsystem (Davis & Davis, 2007). If a bystander has experienced challenges in their life, they may take on the role of a ‘scapegoat’ and blame people or factors that have influenced their negative online behaviour.

### **Perceived Cyber Bully Motivation.**

According to the participants, there were three main motivations as to why individuals cyberbullied. These reasons included cyberbullying been viewed as an ‘easy’ way to bully, the anonymity (hiding behind a screen) and fewer consequences. It was evident that social media was viewed as an easy platform for cyberbullying, as Ayavuya reported:

“You want to say something back to that person even more painful, so you just go to social media, the best place to bully someone”.

The above extract revealed that Ayavuya believed that bullying through social media is the ‘best’ as it clearly has many ‘benefits’ to cyber bully someone else; it is easier, there are fewer consequences and it is anonymous. The three emergent sub themes can be viewed as being interlinked with each other as what makes cyberbullying *easy* is that of *anonymity* and *fewer consequences*. Therefore, anonymity and fewer consequences result in cyberbullying been seen as an ‘easy’ way of bullying a victim.

#### ***Hiding behind a screen: “People feel safe; they are safe guarded behind a screen”.***

All the participants associated the anonymous nature of cyberbullying as a motivation to cyber bully. This motivation allows a cyber bully to ‘lose oneself’ in cyberspace and it creates a sense of invisibility as it lacks the physical distance. For example, Kevin indicated that:

“Cos if you know who the person is you can tell them to stop, get them into trouble, but if its someone you don’t know like if it’s on Instagram or something, they can keep doing it, so you don’t know who it is”.

When a victim is aware of who the cyber bully is, the cyber victim or cyber bystander may report the bullying. However, due to the anonymity on social media, a cyber bully will be motivated to bully as they will feel ‘safe,’ knowing that they are anonymous and can therefore say or do whatever they want without consequences. Kevin was not aware of who was responsible for the creation of his fake Instagram account. This therefore allowed the cyber bully to continue cyberbullying. Kendra labelled this motivation as “hiding behind a screen”:

“Ya cos you won’t just go up to a person, okay like sometimes you do but you won’t just go up to a person you don’t know, like if they are busy commenting or something, that’s why you have the courage to comment at home, because they hiding behind the screen because they will comment what they wanna say”.

Kendra’s idea of a cyber bully “hiding behind a screen” can be viewed in two ways. Firstly, a cyber bully physically is behind their cell phone, laptop or computer screen. On the other hand, this metaphor can be further used to describe how a cyber bully uses the screen to ‘hide’ behind. It creates a perceived barrier between the cyber bully and victim, in order to not get hit (as there is a lack of physical distance), to feel unemotionally attached to the victim which results in saying more hurtful words or comments and lastly it creates the perception that they won’t get caught due to the anonymity. The anonymity and ‘barrier’ has resulted in the cyber bully having courage to bully as they feel ‘safe’ and ‘powerful.’ This ‘safety’ and ‘powerfulness’ created is indicated by Mark, “It’s also harder to prove, like nobody can tell who you are, there are just different ways; it’s just easier to get away with it and not get caught”. The anonymity thus results in a motivation as cyber bullies (as pointed out by Kendra) “want to be looked at like I’ve got the power, I can do whatever I want”. This anonymity is further highlighted by Ayavuya:

“Um, it’s because maybe they just want to say something to them, something bad. Like they just cannot face them so they do it online instead”.

The above revealed that bullying online has created a platform for individuals to say bad, hurtful things. This platform has further created a ‘safe space’ for cyber bullies as they feel ‘safe’ and ‘untouchable’ as Crystal mentioned:

“Because people feel safe, they are safe guarded behind a screen, nobody is there to say anything to their face, nobody is there to physically stop them so on a screen they can get away with a lot more I mean there is not much that can happen they can just keep recreating accounts and changing usernames and they can never be found like there is a lot to hide behind. They don’t have to reveal their identities where as in person everyone is like oh you are what you are, a bully”.

Cyber bullies therefore feel ‘safe’ bullying behind a screen as it does not allow them to feel vulnerable or scared. They can continue to bully as no one knows their identity. Having experienced cyberbullying herself, Crystals perception of why cyber bullies bully stemmed from her perceived reasoning as to why someone created a fake account of her. Not only does

the above reveal that cyber bullies feel 'safe' behind a screen and therefore they bully online, but it also demonstrated that bullies cyber bully instead as they do not want to be judged or seen as a bully. The latter is highlighted by Crystal who reported, "You are what you are, a bully". In addition, this sub-theme illustrated how cyberbullying fosters disinhibition, as it allows a cyber bully to remain anonymous and to also avoid social disapproval.

***Fewer consequences: "In person you stand the risk of being seen doing it and being klapped"***. It was evident that the participants perceived fewer consequences to be one of the main motivations for a bully to cyber bully. This point is summarised by Kendra, "You have less chance of being hit so you can be like hmm hmm hmm on your phone". The "hmm hmm hmm" revealed that cyber bullies can say anything they want and they won't get physically hit as there is a physical distance between them and their victim. In addition, Mark reported, "Because they are a coward! I think it's people that are too scared to physically say something to their faces out of fear of being whacked so they do it over the phone". Mark further indicated:

"Ya if someone is hiding like in some of the situations I have seen they don't necessarily know who the person is like they have a random Instagram account so no one knows who you are so you can do whatever you want but in person you stand the risk of being seen doing it and being klapped if someone is not in a good mood and so on".

Mark viewed someone who bullies online as someone who is a "coward". His perception of being a 'coward' revealed that people who cyber bully are too scared to bully face-to-face, therefore they would rather 'hide behind a screen' (similar to a coward). The above extract highlighted two motivations to cyber bully; anonymity or 'hiding behind a screen' (as mentioned previously) and fewer consequences. In traditional bullying, a bully has a higher chance of being physically hit, however online, the risk is minimal. Therefore, Mark believed this to be one of the reasons why someone would bully online instead. Mark's view is similar to Bhengu's:

"That's simple because like that's for people who are scared of the person that they are bullying, like not scared of them but like they know that if they had to say it to their face like something in them would make them want to go crazy so like some people will just rather do it on the phone when someone cannot like do anything. Which does result in a fight even like when you see each other face to face like it does result in a fight, but like it's easier like when like over the phone cos when you think it you just like type it and send it and you like

feel happy with yourself, which is like really sad, but like as you feel something boom you post it”.

Both Bhengu and Mark perceived people who cyber bully as being cowards who are scared. Both of their similar views may stem from the fact that they both play first team rugby (social hierarchy at a school). Furthermore, during their interviews they both attempted to come across as wanting to be perceived as ‘manly’ and ‘tough’ males. Thus, for them, someone who cannot ‘stand up’ to a victim or bully in person and then subsequently resorting to cyberbullying results in their idea of that person being a ‘coward.’ Not only does Bhengu’s extract reveal that people cyber bully because there are fewer consequences, but it also highlighted the sub-theme that cyberbullying is perceived to be easier.

***Easiness of bullying online: “It’s just easier to get away with it”.*** It appeared that participants perceived cyberbullying to be an ‘easy’ way to bully someone else. Due to the accessible nature of cell phones and social media, it allows cyber bullies the opportunity to engage in bullying behaviours that they would not normally engage in during face-to-face interactions. Bhengu’s perception illustrates the easiness of bullying online:

“It’s easier like when like over the phone cos when you think it you just like type it and send it”.

Mark believed that people who cyberbullied were normally those that could not think of insults face-to-face, however, through social media and technology it allowed them the opportunity to bully:

“I feel like it depends also like in some situations, if its someone from the school that you know, I feel like they probably have a bone to pick with you for whatever reason, I feel like it might be a situation where they are waiting to make insults if you know what I mean? Like they are not quick enough to think of insults on the spot like physical confrontation, whereas over the phone they can Google insults and think of insults over time. It’s not as if you have to be quick and think quickly and decide what to say”.

The above revealed that the rise in technology and the internet has created an opportunity for bullies to have easier access to participate in bullying. Thus, bullies who may lack confidence are ‘hiding behind a screen.’ Kendra further highlighted this perception:

“There was this thing I saw on Instagram about this whatever dude, he said on Instagram about how this girl looks ugly and all of this and it’s also mostly influenced by like the rappers you know what I mean, like yoh girl you aint like

dis and dis, you know what I mean instead of having to meet someone and having to face them, you just have to say it, it's just words".

Kendra's perception of cyberbullying being easy stemmed from observing cyberbullying. She viewed it as something 'easy' where this 'dude' was able to bully online as it was just 'words'. Words are easy to say and together with the 'barrier' of a cell phone or computer screen, cyber bullies are motivated to participate in bullying as it does not take a lot of effort. In addition, not only is it 'easier' to cyber bully, but the anonymous nature of social media has allowed bullying to be 'easier' in the sense that a cyber bully won't be caught. This point is highlighted by Kevin:

"Cos if you know who the person is you can tell them to stop, get them into trouble, but if it's someone you don't know like if it's on Instagram or something, they can keep doing it, so you don't know who it is".

Therefore, a cyber bully may continue to bully online as they won't get reported as they are anonymous. The bullying becomes an 'easy' way of bullying due to the easy access, fewer consequences and anonymous nature.

### **Discussion of Perceived Cyber Bully Motivation.**

The results revealed that participants perceived cyber bullies to be motivated to bully online because of the easiness of bullying, anonymity and fewer consequences. These findings were somewhat similar to Varjas's et al. (2010) study of high school students' perceptions of cyberbullying. These students perceived three external motivators; no consequences, non-confrontational and viewing the victim as being different. The latter motivator however was not found in this study. The finding of accessibility was consistent with Englander's (2008) study. Cyberbullying creates opportunities for bullies to take time and think of their comments and as Mark even indicated, "can Google insults". This accessibility allows the cyber bully to not physically face their victim and thus makes it easier to bully online (Lohmann, 2010).

The participants' perceptions of anonymity being a motivator to cyber bully mirrors the literature. This literature argues that the anonymous nature allows cyber bullies to feel 'free' to behave in cyberbullying behaviour that they normally would not in the 'real world' (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Shariff, 2009). The ability to 'hide behind a screen' on social media has resulted in perceived anonymity. This has created many negative consequences, one being that cyberbullies will threaten or humiliate a victim more severely compared to face-to-face

(Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Participants perceptions concurred with the disinhibition effect where the cyber bullies' accountability cues are reduced (Joinson, 1998). This was illustrated by Mark, "Like nobody can tell who you are, there are just different ways, it's just easier to get away with it and not get caught". In addition, Crystal mentioned, "They can get away with a lot more, I mean there is not much that can happen...they can never be found like there is a lot to hide behind". This finding was also interesting as several studies have found that the victims knew the identity of their bully (Mishna, 2009; Vandebosch & Cleemput, 2008). Social media and the internet allow the cyber bully to feel "safe guarded behind a screen" as Crystal points out. This therefore creates a unique characteristic of technology as it creates a shield of protection for bullies and thus a motivation to cyber bully (Tokunaga, 2010).

According to Willard (2006), cyber bullies have no direct social disapproval or punishment (consequences) for cyberbullying and this result in cyberbullying becoming an easy method to bully. Not receiving social disapproval minimises the cyber bullies mentalisation and they are able to continue to bully online. The anonymity and lack of distance in technology has clearly affected cyberbullies capacity to think. This has resulted in the loss of the ability to mentalise appropriately. Participants perceived the third motivator to be that of fewer consequences. Their perceptions of consequences included not getting physically hit (Barlett et al., 2014; Hobbs, 2009) and not getting in trouble (Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, 2012).

### **Individual, Contextual and Societal Factors.**

It emerged that the participants perceived specific individual and contextual factors to influence both types of bullying. In addition, it was evident that the participants' cultural beliefs (influenced by societal expectations) played a significant role in bullying.

*Individual and Contextual factors: "It's like all of my frustrations of the pain that I feel, everything that is inside me or things that are going on in my life, I just take it out on you".* The emerging individual and contextual factors were: household problems, socioeconomic background of the school, lack of school authority and poor parent relationships. Ayavuya had experienced a difficult life growing up as she currently lives with her Grandmother and has no relationship with her Mother (only sees her twice a year). She dislikes her step father and unconsciously all she wants is to be loved. Her unstable life and poor attachment figures have resulted in her bullying other people:

“Yes, it just comes up, all at once. It’s like all of my frustrations of the pain that I feel, everything that is inside me or things that are going on in my life, I just take it out on you because you just provoked me at the wrong time”.

These household problems have created pain and frustration for Ayavuya and as a result she experienced aggression:

I: “So do you think that from your past and everything that you have experienced like your dad’s death for example, do you think that that contributes to let’s say you feeling angry and wanting to hit someone?”

A: “Yes it does. Especially when you are just going to come up to me and say whatever you are going to say to me. Then I am going to react”.

I: “(nods) Do you think that’s why people react normally? Do you think because they have been through something in there past?”

A: “Yes. It’s also like why I understand bullying the way I do, because it’s how I also react to someone makes me angry...I hit them instantly and it turns out bad”.

Ayavuya openly admitted that her past has an impact on the way she understands and makes sense of bullying. All her anger, pain and resentment that she holds against her mother, her father’s death and poor attachment figures have resulted in her becoming angry and easily triggered to bully others. Although Crystal did not mention any personal family problems, she had a similar view to Ayavuya. When asked what motivates someone to bully, she reported “I think with bullying, it’s more like the attention or the unhappy home life”. This therefore revealed that an individual who comes from an unstable home environment may be more susceptible to bullying or cyberbullying.

For Mark on the other hand, the type of school played a crucial role in the development of bullying. Mark previously attended a Government all boys school in Durban, where he mentioned students were from poor socio-economic backgrounds:

“The other school was in a much rougher area, an all boys school, so a lot of the situations took place in beat downs at school and in parks and taxi ranks, different places”.

He further mentioned that bullying occurred because of:

“The school itself, socio-economic situations, upbringing like parents and how rough their area is. Like my old school was in a rough area and parents really didn’t care like you fought for yourself, here it’s different”.

Marks perception of how and why bullying occurred stemmed from his previous experience at his previous school. It was clear that at his previous school, a significant amount of bullying took place, which he interpreted as occurring because of the socio economic status of the school as well as parents not caring. It emerged that schools play a crucial role in the continuation of bullying. Some participants indicated that teachers currently do nothing to stop the bullying. Kevin for example mentioned:

“No the teachers walk around but they don’t do anything really”.

According to Kevin, traditional bullying occurs mostly during lunch time. Although teachers are present and reportedly walk around during this time, they witness the bullying but do not do anything about it. For Mark (who attended a low socio-economic school previously), he indicated that some teachers are aware of the bullying that occurs, however they do not do anything about it as they are scared of the bullies retaliating. He further mentioned, “Oh there are school policies but they are just not enforced”. Bhengu further openly admitted that some teachers were aware that bullying occurred and they witness it; but do nothing about it. When asked why the teachers do nothing, he reported:

“Like some teachers will think oh that other boys need to man up and toughen up you know, especially the male teachers”.

Bhengu’s perception of the lack of school authority stems from firstly his own personal desire to be perceived as ‘manly’ and ‘strong.’ Secondly, he believed that the male teachers do not report or react to the bullying due to their perceptions of the role of males in society. For Crystal, her experience was different to the other participants, which resulted in her reasoning for the lack of school authority. Crystal reported an incident during school photograph day where she was verbally bullied by a Teacher in front of the whole school:

“So like I have naturally curly hair and I always keep my hair straight cos it’s much more manageable and easy to contain, and one day I came to school with my hair full curly and I was accused of being an Afghani dog. Which I don’t understand cos an Afghani dog has long straight hair but anyways a teacher got very upset cos I left my hair curly and it was photo day and he was used to seeing my hair straight and the more I tried to explain to him that my hair is naturally curly the more he accused me of changing on photo day and he swore and got aggressive”.

Crystal’s experience appeared to have affected her significantly and she became emotional when explaining her story. What affected her the most was that there were no repercussions for the teacher and the school did nothing about it. For Crystal, the school not

doing anything to the teacher created a perception in the school that it was ‘okay’ to bully others. This therefore contributed to her view that teachers or schools do nothing to stop bullying.

***Societal Expectations: “A man is supposed to be tough you know; a man is supposed to be strong”/ “Snitches get stitches!”*** Participants had specific cultural beliefs that were influenced by societal expectations. These expectations were perceived to contribute and maintain bullying or cyberbullying. Perceptions that men are supposed to portray themselves as ‘tough’ or ‘manly’ contributed to how the participants perceived the role of gender in bullying. Mark for example believed:

“Ya I think society put it so that if you are a man and if you are an adult you are supposed to physically lash out and try defend yourself but girls are less likely to do so”.

Therefore, in schools, the perception above results in boys assuming that they need to be physical in order to be viewed as more manly. This is thus contributing to the perception that boys participate more in traditional bullying (physical) and it subsequently creates an expectation. If a boy is not physical, they are perceived to be ‘gay,’ and Kevin indicated that in their school, people will think, “If you are gay then you mean nothing, you are worthless, and ya you shouldn’t be here”. Boys in schools clearly do not want to be perceived as being ‘gay’ and they therefore engage in bullying behaviour in order to conform to societal expectations. Bhengu has a similar view to Kevin and Mark and he mentioned:

“A man is supposed to be tough you know; a man is supposed to be strong”.

As mentioned throughout the themes, Bhengu attempted to come across as a ‘manly’ strong male who played first team rugby and was popular among his peers. For Bhengu, a male should be tough and strong, as if they are not, Kevin suggested that, “You are then weak and will be bullied”. Kendra further agreed with the male participants:

“Boys I think just have that natural fight in them you know what I mean, and also they are influenced by all that wrestling and things that they see so it’s like okay I am gonna try that out”.

This perception that boys have a ‘natural’ fighting ability creates a belief that it is okay for boys to fight physically and also to physically retaliate back to bullies. Kendra also indicated above that wrestling influences boys, therefore the role of media has an influence on this societal belief. Within this sub-theme, it was further evident that the cultural perception of bystanders being viewed as ‘snitches’ contributed to the maintenance of bullying or cyberbullying. This point is illustrated by Kendra who said, “People say, snitches get stitches”.

Thus, the main reason why bullying continues and no one reports it is because of the stigmatization attached to people who ‘snitch.’ This results in people being afraid of reporting. Mark mentioned:

“You don’t snitch and it doesn’t matter if its bullying or like ya snitches get stitches, it’s as simple as that, you don’t tell, it doesn’t matter what’s going on, it’s just worse for you”.

It is clear from the above extract that there are consequences for bystanders who ‘snitch’ and report the bullying. This results in bystanders being too afraid to snitch and therefore remain passive.

### **Discussion of Individual, Contextual and Societal Factors.**

The above-mentioned super-ordinate theme appears to mirror that of Bronfenbrenner’s Social Ecological theory (1979). It appeared that the school environment plays a crucial role in the existence of bullying. The high school in the study was a place which allowed bullying to occur due to the perceived lack of authority and cultural beliefs. Therefore, the interactions between children and their environment play a role in the development or inhibition of prosocial and antisocial behaviours (Lerner, Hess & Nitz, 1991). This was clearly indicated as Ayavuya reported, “It’s like all of my frustrations of the pain that I feel, everything that is inside me or things that are going on in my life, I just take it out on you.” Thus, problems that occur in a child’s life are a result of the continuation of interactions between the two (Pianta & Walsh, 1996).

Although Bronfenbrenner’s theory (1979) was applied throughout the super-ordinate themes, this particular super-ordinate theme captures the different individual contextual and societal factors that participants perceived to contribute to the existence of cyberbullying and bullying. It was revealed for example that within the high school, there were cultural beliefs that were influenced by societal expectations. The perception of males bullying or retaliating in order to be perceived as ‘tough’ or ‘manly’ was evident as indicated by Bhengu, Kevin and Mark. Similarly, Hinduja and Patchin (2009) argue that it is highly unlikely that cyberbullying or bullying alone are the main contributors to children and adolescent experiencing psychological or physical effects. Rather, there are other emotional or social issues occurring in the victim’s life and cyberbullying or bullying only exacerbates these effects. This was evident in Ayavuya’s and Kendra’s experiences as they both suffered from depression and

anxiety. This appeared to exacerbate their bullying experiences, as well as exacerbate the experiences of Bhengu, Kevin and Mark's experience with bullying and societal expectations.

The perceived four individual and contextual factors that may 'exacerbate' cyberbullying or bullying are household problems, socioeconomic background of the school, lack of school authority and poor parent relationships. Although Bauman (2010) mentioned that teachers are concerned about bullying in schools, results have revealed that the teachers are aware of bullying (some even bullied themselves), however they are not doing anything about it. Kevin for example reported that, "The teachers walk around but they don't do anything really." In addition, both Mark and Bhengu also felt that there was a lack of school authority, even though the teachers were aware of the bullying. This was consistent with student perceptions from Dooley's et al. (2009) study. Although Dooley's et al. (2009) participants perceived schools to be somewhat active in dealing with bullying and cyberbullying, the minority indicated that their schools often turned a 'blind eye.' This finding from Dooley's et al. (2009) study mirrored the finding in the current study, as teachers appear to simply turn 'blind eye' to bullying. The lack of school authority allows the bullying to exist and to a degree shows the students that it is 'okay' and acceptable to bully. In addition, the school environment is emerging as a crucial factor for the existence of bullying and victimisation (Swearer et al., 2010).

The role of parenting and family were factors that may contribute to cyberbullying and bullying. Parental guidance and quality of home life have been found to be factors identifying students who engage in cyberbullying (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). This was consistent with the findings as Ayavuya came from a dysfunctional and unsupportive home. As a result, she became susceptible to bullying and was the perpetrator of cyberbullying and traditional bullying. This finding also revealed that families are crucial for the healthy development of a child. Children who come from unstable or conflictual family environments may experience negative consequences, emotionally and psychologically. Swearer et al. (2010) for example argue that parents are able to provide their children with the ability to learn emotions, regulate their emotions, cope with conflict and problem solve. For Ayavuya however, she had a difficult upbringing, where she lost her father and has had no relationship with her mother. She thus has been unable to learn the necessary regulation of emotions or coping correctly with conflict. This has influenced her current behaviour and bullying experiences.

An interesting perception was that of Mark as he indicated that at his previous school (a low socio economic school) there was a high amount of bullying as due to the "socio-economic situations, upbringing like parents and how rough their area is." Fitzpatrick et al.

(2007) argued that low socio economic schools are more likely to have less resources that may protect students from been victimised. Students from these types of schools often perceive their school environment to be unsafe, which was illustrated in Marks perception. This finding mirrored literature as several studies have found that both bullies and victims are more likely to attend a lower socio economic school (Jansen et al., 2012; Jansen et al., 2011). On the other hand, Garner and Hinton (2010) and Veenstra et al. (2005) have found no association. Thus, these findings revealed that the occurrence of bullying behaviour is dependent on different factors (Nabuzoka, 2003).

From the participant's perceptions, it was evident that there were societal factors and expectations that contribute to cyberbullying and bullying behaviour. Sociological theorists argue that school cultural beliefs can maintain inequality, exclusion and aggression (Leach, 2003). Participants indicated that due to societal beliefs that men need to be seen as 'tough' or 'manly,' boys participate in traditional bullying. The perception of not wanting to be perceived as weak stems from the societal beliefs that if an individual is perceived as weak, he or she is more susceptible to being bullied (Mishna, 2009). The idea of societal beliefs and expectations within a school environment, is also influenced by the peers. According to Salmivalli et al. (1996), bullying includes active and passive participation of multiple individuals. In addition, peers will assist other peers in the process of bullying or reinforce it by encouraging the bullies. Thus, collectively, the peers within the school (together with the school environment itself) have created these societal expectations which have contributed to the existence and maintenance of bullying. This also highlights the importance of understanding how a student exists and interacts within a complex ecological system. It shows how the microsystem (such as the school) provides a setting in which the student participates directly in and how it can have a significant effect on the existence of bullying. In this particular school, it is clear that it is somewhat enabling bullying during the students' interaction within the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

These findings may explain why some research has found boys to participate more in traditional bullying (Kowalski et al., 2008). These cultural beliefs may be contributing to cyberbullying or bullying behaviours and may further explain the gender differences found in this study. Lastly, the participants' belief that "snitches get stitches" appeared to be a significant perception that may be contributing to bystanders not reporting bullying. This belief has further been found in several studies (Browning, 2014; Stewart; 2012). According to Patton et al. (2013), within the microsystem, the quality of peer relationships "may influence or inhibit bullying and peer victimisation" (p. 248). Therefore, the participants' perceptions and

experiences of the peer relationships at their school is of a poor quality. As a result, bullying is often unreported due to the fear of being labelled a ‘snitch.’ This revealed that if the quality of the peer relationships is poor, it will influence bullying and peer victimisation. This super-ordinate theme demonstrated that there are specific factors that influence high school students and contribute to the existence and maintenance of bullying.

## **Summary**

This chapter outlined and discussed the research findings. It provided a comprehensive understanding of each participants’ experience and perception of cyberbullying. This was achieved through providing the participants verbatim words and an interpretation of the participants cyberbullying experiences and perceptions. The main findings and conclusions that emerged from the results of the study will be discussed in Chapter 6.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion, Recommendations and Limitations**

This study qualitatively explored the experiences and perceptions of cyberbullying amongst high school students from an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis perspective. This chapter therefore outlines the conclusion, recommendations and limitations of the study.

The overall objective of the study was to obtain a clear understanding of the experiences and perceptions associated with cyberbullying amongst High School students. This included understanding the experiences and perceived qualities of cyberbullying, the perceived difference between cyberbullying and traditional bullying qualities and lastly, the perceived differentiated roles in cyberbullying.

In accordance with the IPA methodology, six overarching super-ordinate themes and emergent sub-themes were derived from the data. The themes include the following: (1) Perceptions and Characteristics of Cyberbullying, (2) Parent Monitoring, (3) Cyberbullying vs. Traditional Bullying, (4) Perceived Cyber Bystander Motivation, (5) Perceived Cyber Bully Motivation and finally, (6) Individual, Contextual and Societal factors.

### **Conclusions**

Six themes emerged and several conclusions were made. Cyberbullying was understood to include the comments and messages on social media to hurt people, post insults, publically humiliate a victim and create fake accounts online. It appeared that cyberbullying occurs mostly during the night and victims are unable to physically or emotionally ‘escape’ it. It further emerged that parents do not monitor their children’s online activity. The lack of monitoring was perceived to be the result of parents lack of knowledge (due to the generation gap and subsequent increase of technology) and the high amount of trust placed in their children.

Cyberbullying and traditional bullying clearly share similarities and differences. An interesting emerging theme was that the two phenomenon appeared to share a cyclical relationship, whereby traditional bullying at school activated cyberbullying at home. It can further be concluded that cyberbullying has a greater impact on the victims due to the wide unknown audience (bystanders) on social media; compared to the audience in traditional bullying. A significant finding was that gender played a role in differentiating between the two types of bullying. Girls were perceived to more likely participate in cyberbullying (a form of

indirect traditional bullying), whereas boys were more likely to participate in traditional bullying (direct form).

The reasons why participants perceived cyber bystanders to remain passive and not actively intervene, was a result of the perception that it was not the cyber bystanders place to take action, perceived online helplessness and not being taken seriously online due to the overall 'fake' virtual world of cyberspace. Defending a victim online was viewed as being ineffective and participants believed that cyber bystanders did not have the power to stop cyberbullying. However, bystanders in traditional bullying have the power to stop it. Thus, the role of the helpful (altruistic bystander) is clearly non-existent in cyberbullying as they are 'powerless.' The perceived motivation for a cyber bystander to join the bully include; fear of retaliation, gaining power and the anonymous nature of social media. It was revealed that cyber bystanders might experience pleasure and enjoyment from participating in cyberbullying. The enjoyment experienced and anonymous nature (as well as distance) of cyberbullying may result in cyber bystanders low mentalisation ability. This contributes to cyber bystanders becoming somewhat dehumanized as they are able to remain anonymous and subsequently will not face social disapproval. Lastly, cyber bystanders who take pleasure in cyberbullying appear to not take responsibility for joining the cyberbully. They take on the role of scapegoating and blame their negative online behavior on their previous bullying experiences or their problems at home.

Cyberbullies were motivated to bully online as social media provides a 'screen' to 'hide' behind (remain anonymous), there are fewer consequences and it is simply an easier method to bully. It is evident that the disinhibition effect may explain the cyberbullies online behaviour and moral disengagement allows the cyberbully to justify their actions. It was clear that Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological theory has the power to identify the factors that influence bullying and cyberbullying. Within the microsystem, the following factors contribute to the existence and continuation of cyberbullying and bullying: household problems, low socioeconomic status of the school, lack of school authority and poor parent relationships. Lastly, within the macrosystem, specific cultural beliefs and societal expectations appear to create and maintain both types of bullying.

In accordance with the above-mentioned objectives of the study, the following is therefore concluded: The participants all had different experiences and perceptions of cyberbullying, however, their experiences or observations of cyberbullying resulted in similar views. Cyberbullying appears to be a phenomenon that creates fear in cyber victims. It further creates a feeling that the victim emotionally or physically cannot escape the bullying. Although there may be similarities and differences between cyberbullying and traditional bullying, it

appeared that cyberbullying may have a greater impact on victims. As mentioned previously, the victim is unable to escape cyberbullying, physically or emotionally. and the wider audience results in more people observing or joining the cyber bully. Not only does the wide audience allow more cyber bystanders to observe, it also creates a fear of the 'unknown' in the victim, as they do not know who has witnessed the bullying. Cyber victims are unable to further escape as it mostly occurs at nighttime when victims appear to be more vulnerable. During the night, victims are isolated in their home environment and both this isolation and vulnerability has a greater impact on the victim's experience of cyberbullying. On the other hand, traditional bullying mostly occurs during the day at school.

Traditional bullying at school appears to 'activate' the cycle of bullying, and cyberbullying subsequently follows. The anonymity of hiding behind a screen, easiness of bullying online and fewer consequences are motivators for a cyber bully as well as a reason for more bystanders joining the bully. Another difference is the role of the bystander (which will further be discussed below), as it emerged that cyber bystanders are powerless and do not have the ability to actively stop cyberbullying. Alternatively, traditional bullying bystanders may have the ability to stop the bullying due to the face-to-face interaction. A similarity is the role that adults play in the existence of both types of bullying. During school time, there is a lack of authority and teachers are subsequently not stopping the bullying. This mirrors the role of adults in cyberbullying, as parents do not monitor their children's online activity due to the generation gap, lack of knowledge and misplaced trust.

Technology has created many opportunities and techniques for cyberbullies to bully online. It has become easier to bully online as cyber bullies have access to their cell phones all day and they can take time and think of their insults. Bullies are further motivated, as they can remain anonymous and therefore will not experience social disapproval or judgment. This behavior results in a loss of mentalisation and enables the cyber bully to continue to engage in 'dehumanizing' behaviour. Furthermore, they face fewer consequences as they can 'hide' behind the screen and cannot be hit or get into trouble. Lastly, it appears that the role of the cyber bystander is somewhat nonexistent. They are viewed as being helpless and powerless. Due to the anonymity, easiness and fewer consequences of cyberbullying, cyber bystanders are more likely to join the cyber bully. In addition to the appealing characteristics of cyberbullying, some cyber bystanders may be motivated to join the cyberbully. Reasons for motivation may include retaliation or a dysfunctional family environment. They therefore may experience a buildup of frustration and anger and cyberbullying becomes an easy pathway to release these frustrations and experience satisfaction. They perceive their ability to stop cyberbullying as

being ineffective as there is a lack of physical distance over social media. The distance results in cyber bystanders believing that they will not be taken seriously and subsequently they remain passive. Although bystanders in traditional bullying may have the ability to intervene because of the face-to-face interaction, cyber bystanders found many reasons to assist and they subsequently view themselves as powerless. As a result, cyber bystanders adopt the following bystander roles: passive, avoidant and abdicating.

### **Limitations**

This study only included six participants, therefore their experiences and perceptions must be interpreted from an individual perspective. Readers would need to decide whether the context of this study could be applied to their situations or research before assessing the transferability of the results. The self as an instrument in qualitative research plays a crucial role. Although throughout the research process I attempted to maintain a level of objectivity, it became evident that it is not always possible. However, due to the steps and guidelines taken in order to achieve validity, I made every effort to be rigorous in the overall process.

Majority of the participants were forth coming with information; however, one participant in particular made it extremely difficult to ‘extract’ rich data. Efforts were made in order for all participants to feel comfortable and at ease, however it cannot be expected that all the participants would communicate openly and present rich, detailed lived experiences.

### **Recommendations**

The study has several important implications for the field of cyberbullying, specifically in South Africa. It highlighted the importance of considering students’ perceptions and experiences from a qualitative approach. More qualitative studies will allow researchers to identify students’ in-depth perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying. It also highlighted the importance of the need for more research in South Africa (Lazarus, 2006). Different countries and cultures define and understand the term differently and more research will assist in gaining knowledge of how South Africans in particular understand cyberbullying in comparison to other countries (Smith et al., 2002). Although cyberbullying is a somewhat recent phenomenon, theoretical frameworks are limited in literature (Veenstra et al., 2005).

The study highlighted this limitation, as the theoretical frameworks applied were previously developed to explain traditional bullying. The development of cyberbullying

theories will allow researchers, parents, schools, government and school counsellors to be more knowledgeable about the phenomenon.

Results revealed that there is a lack of parental monitoring (due to the perceived generation gap). Therefore, parent awareness talks and presentations are needed. This will assist parents in becoming aware of technology and the different social media sites (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). In addition, parents need to be educated on cyberbullying specifically, as this will allow them to teach their children the detrimental effects of bullying online and be aware of the different coping strategies and interventions available (Brunner & Lewis, 2009). Lastly, it is clear that schools need to become more active in intervening in traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Hall, 2017). They need to take responsibility for bullying in schools and teachers should attend workshops to be more aware of the seriousness of the phenomenon. Increasing teachers' awareness of bullying as well as placing emphasis on the significance of intervening may improve their intervention (Pepler et al., 1994). In addition, schools should implement policies and frameworks. This may assist the school in creating a 'safe' environment and may minimise victimisation.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee Approval Letter



29 May 2018

Ms Sarah Jane Schofield (212534832)  
School of Applied Human Sciences – Psychology  
Howard College Campus

Dear Ms Schofield,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0405/018M  
Project Title: Perceptions and experiences of Cyberbullying amongst high school students

#### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 03 May 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Professor Duncan James Cartwright  
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Maud Mthembu  
Cc School Administrator: Ms Ayanda Ntuli

---

#### Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4809 Email: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za) / [snymanm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snymanm@ukzn.ac.za) / [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)

Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

## Appendix B: Department of Education, Umdoni Circuit Manager Approval Letter



**education**

Department:  
Education  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**Umdoni Circuit**

Enquiries: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Cell No: [REDACTED]

02/05/2018

For Att: Ms Sarah Schofield,

### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT [REDACTED]

Your request to conduct research at [REDACTED] in respect of your studies Masters in Psychology is noted.

Due permission is hereby granted by the Department of Education subject to all the conditions enunciated by yourself in your request to us.

Principal [REDACTED] will be duly informed hereof.

Best of luck with your studies.

Kind Regards,

[REDACTED]  
[Circuit Manager - Umdoni]

PROVINCE OF KWAZULU - NATAL	
UMNYANGO WEMFUNDO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION DEPARTEMENT VAN ONDERWYS	
2018 -05- 02	
ISIKHWAMA SEPOSI PRIVATE BAG / PRIVAAT SAK UMZINTO	X0515
[REDACTED]	CMC

...Championing Quality Education - Creating and Securing a Brighter Future

## Appendix C: School Principal Approval Letter

Tel: [REDACTED]

Fax: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Website: [REDACTED]

10 April 2018

School of Applied Human Sciences  
College of Humanities  
Howard College Campus  
University of KwaZulu Natal  
Durban

### Ms. S. Schofield – Permission to Conduct Research

Dear Sir/Ma'am

Thank you for your request to come to [REDACTED] to conduct research on cyber bullying with our learners.

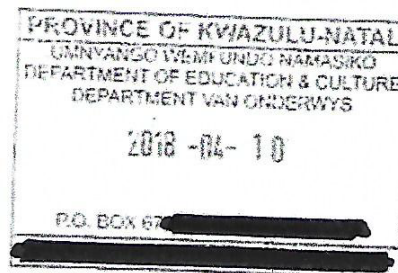
[REDACTED] will gladly assist where we can to our best ability, as Ms. Schofield is a past educator here and feel that the learners will be very comfortable in talking openly with her regarding the above research.

Should you have any other correspondence and/or dates in mind for the research interviews, please feel free to contact [REDACTED] on either the above numbers or via email [REDACTED], he will happy to assist where he can.

Yours faithfully

[REDACTED]

M. [REDACTED]  
Principal





UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL

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INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

# CYBERBULLYING AND BULLYING STUDY

**Participants needed for research in cyberbullying and bullying.**

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study focusing on their perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying and bullying.

As a participant in this study, you will attend 1 interview ( $\pm 45$  minutes) with the researcher and answer questions about your understanding and opinion of cyberbullying and bullying.

**Who can participate?**

- ✓ Students from Grade 8-12.
- ✓ Anyone who is interested in discussing and giving their opinion about cyberbullying/bullying.

**If you are interested in participating, what must you do?**

- ✓ Collect an information letter and informed consent form (to give to your parents to sign) from Mrs Ritchie at Reception.

Your participation would be greatly appreciated.

For more information or questions about this study, please contact Miss Schofield on 0614567622 or [srh\\_schofield@yahoo.com](mailto:srh_schofield@yahoo.com).

## **Appendix E: Interview Schedule**

### **About the Student:**

1. What grade are you in this school year?
2. How old are you?

### **1. Differences between traditional bullying and cyberbullying**

#### 1.1. What do you understand about bullying?

- Where does it take place?
- Why do you understand it like that?
- Why like that?
- Where does it take place?
- Girls or boys?
- Who are people normally bullied by?

#### 1.2. What do you understand about cyberbullying and what do you make of it?

- What makes you define it like that?
- Where does it take place?
- Why there?
- Social media sites?
- Positive/negative
- How do you know that?
- When is cyberbullying occurring?
- Girls and boys?
- Who are people normally cyberbullied by?

#### 1.3. Do you think cyberbullying is worse than traditional bullying?

- Why?
- In what way?
- Any examples?
- Why do you say it is like that?
- Did something happen? Eg. if say anonymity- ask WHY)

#### 1.4. Bullying experiences?

### **2. Motivations of bullying**

#### 2.1. Why do you think people bully other people?

*-Why do you say that?*

*-Did something happen that you view it like that?*

*-Girls or boys?*

2.2.Pretend to be in the shoes of a cyber bully, why do you think that someone would cyber bully??

*-Why do you say that?*

*-Did something happen that you view it like that?*

*-Girls or boys?*

2.3.Why do people cyberbully instead of bully?

*-What makes you say that?*

2.4. Why is the victim chosen as the target?

*-Why?*

*-Do you think they tell people that they are getting cyberbullied? If so, who and why?*

*-Would you tell someone?*

*- If not why?*

*-Do adults monitor phone usage/social media?*

*-What can they do to stop it?*

2.5.Do you think that cyberbullying is a serious problem? (*possible prompts: why? Why is it a serious problem? What can be done to stop the problem?*)

### **3. The role of the bystander**

***In bullying we get people who just watch and observe and do not do anything about it. These are called bystanders.***

3.1.Why do you think someone who is witnessing bullying will do nothing about it?

*-Why do you think that? Scared?*

*-Would you stop someone bullying?*

3.2.Do you think a bystander is worse in cyberbullying or bullying?

*-Why?*

3.3.Do you think a bystander can help stop the bullying?

*-Why?*

*- Why do you think some people watch and do nothing?*

*-Why do you think other people get involved and help the bully?*

## Appendix F: Recruitment Slip

<b>Name &amp; Surname</b>	
<b>Grade</b>	
<b>Race</b>	
<b>Contact Number</b>	

## Appendix G: Participant Information and Consent Form

School of Applied Human Sciences  
College of Humanities  
Howard College Campus  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Durban  
4041  
18 March 2018

Dear Participant

### **RE: Information Letter**

My name is Sarah Schofield. I am a Counselling Psychology Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am conducting a research project that will enable me to complete my Masters degree. The aim of my research is to explore the perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying amongst high school students.

If you are interested in participating in the study, you will need to get your parents to read and sign the parent information letter and consent form. You will also be required to sign the consent form on the following page.

The interview will be conducted after school at [REDACTED] and will be approximately 45 minutes. Interview dates and times will be discussed at a further point. During the interview I will ask you questions about cyberbullying. With yours and your parents/guardians informed permission, the session will be audio recorded. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and no payment will be made for your participation. You may withdraw from the study at any time and this will not result in any form of disadvantage. You will not need to answer any question, or participate in the discussion of any topic that could make you feel uncomfortable.

Should you feel upset by anything that has been discussed in the interview; I will be there to talk to you about it afterwards. Should you still feel distressed after the interview; the UKZN Centre of Applied Psychology Clinic will provide counselling, free of charge. All the information that you may share during the interview will be kept confidential by myself as the researcher and my research supervisor. The information will not be revealed to anyone else.

Your name and identity will remain confidential and you will be referred to as a 'participant' in my research report. The interview transcripts will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after five years.

Once you have read the information letter and signed the informed consent form (on the following page), please remove the consent form page. Keep the information letter and hand in both yours and your parents/guardians completed consent form to [REDACTED] at reception. Consent forms will be confidentially and safely stored. You must then listen to the school announcements for further details and information.

For any further information or questions, please feel free to contact me at 0614567622 or [srh\\_schofield@yahoo.com](mailto:srh_schofield@yahoo.com) or my research supervisor, Professor Duncan James Cartwright at 0312602612.

Yours Sincerely

---

Professor D.J. Cartwright  
Research Supervisor

---

Miss S. Schofield  
Researcher

### **Consent Form**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name and surname), in Grade \_\_\_\_\_ have been informed about the study entitled 'Perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying amongst high school students' by Sarah Schofield.

- I understand the purpose and procedure of the study.
- I understand that I will be required to participate in one interview, approximately 45 minutes. I understand the nature of the interview and am aware that the session will be audio recorded.
- I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any treatment or care that I would usually be entitled to.
- I understand that all the information that I may share during the interview will be kept confidential and will not be revealed to anyone else.

- I understand that the interview transcripts will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after five years.
- I have been informed about the counselling available to me should I require this as a result of questions asked and topics discussed during the interview.
- If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher or her supervisor. I have been provided with their contact details.

---

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

---

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN

---

DATE

## Appendix H: Parent/Guardian Information and Consent Form

School of Applied Human Sciences  
College of Humanities  
Howard College Campus  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Durban  
4041  
18 March 2018

Dear Parent/Guardian

### RE: Information Letter

My name is Sarah Schofield. I am a Counselling Psychology Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am conducting a research project that will enable me to complete my Masters degree. The aim of my research is to explore the perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying amongst high school students' at [REDACTED]. Your daughter/son has shown interest in the above mentioned study and I am kindly requesting your permission for your daughter/son to participate in an interview. The interview will be conducted after school at Scottburgh High School and will be approximately 45 minutes. Interview dates and times will be discussed at a further point. During the interview I will ask your daughter/son questions around cyberbullying, such as, *What is cyberbullying? Why do people cyber bully? What are the consequences for someone who is cyberbullied?*

With your informed permission, the session will be audio recorded. Your daughters/sons participation in this research is completely voluntary and no payment will be made for his/her participation. He/she may withdraw from the study at any time and this will not result in any form of disadvantage. He/she will not need to answer any question, or participate in the discussion of any topic that could make him/her feel uncomfortable.

Should your daughter/son feel upset by anything that has been discussed in the interview, I will be there for him/her to talk about it afterwards. If he/she still feels upset after the interview, the UKZN Centre of Applied Psychology Clinic will provide counselling, free of charge (please see letter attached). All the information that your daughter/son may share during the interview will be kept confidential by myself as the researcher and my research supervisor. The information will not be revealed to anyone else.

His/her names and identity will remain confidential and he/she will only be referred to as a 'participant' in my research report. The interview transcripts will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after five years.

Once you have read the information letter and signed the informed consent form (on the following page), please remove the consent form page. Keep the information and referral letter and give the completed consent form to your daughter/son to hand in to [REDACTED] at the [REDACTED] reception. Consent forms will be confidentially and safely stored.

Your daughter/son must listen to the school announcements for further information and details.

For any further information please feel free to contact me at 0614567622 or srh\_schofield@yahoo.com or my research supervisor, Professor Duncan James Cartwright at 0312602612.

Yours Sincerely

---

Professor D.J. Cartwright  
Research Supervisor

---

Miss S. Schofield  
Researcher

### **Consent Form**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Parent/Guardian) of \_\_\_\_\_ (Daughter/Son) in Grade \_\_\_\_ have been informed about the study entitled 'Perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying amongst high school students' by Sarah Schofield.

- I understand the purpose and procedure of the study.
- I understand that my daughter/son will be required to participate in one interview, approximately 45 minutes. I understand the nature of the interview and am aware that the session will be audio recorded.
- I declare that my daughter/sons participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that she/he may withdraw at any time without affecting any treatment or care that she/he would usually be entitled to.
- I understand that all the information that my daughter/son may share during the interview will be kept confidential and will not be revealed to anyone else.

- I understand that the interview transcripts will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after five years.

- I have been informed about the counselling available to my daughter/son should he/she require this as a result of questions asked and topics discussed during the interview.

- If I or my daughter/son have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I or my daughter/son may contact the researcher or her supervisor. I have been provided with their contact details.

---

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN

---

Date

## Appendix I: UKZN Psychology Clinic Referral Letter



School of Applied Human Sciences  
College of Humanities  
Howard College Campus  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Durban  
4041  
18 March 2018

Dear Parent/Guardian

**RE: Referral letter for UKZN Centre of Applied Psychology Clinic**

This letter serves to provide the assurance that should your daughter/son require psychological assistance as a result of any distress arising from the approved research process conducted by students in the Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Sciences, Howard College campus; it will be provided by Psychologists and Intern Psychologists at the UKZN Centre of Applied Psychology Clinic.

Yours sincerely

---

Professor D.J. Cartwright  
Head of Clinical/Counselling Programme  
Discipline of Psychology  
School of Applied Human Sciences

## Appendix J: Turn it in Report



### Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

The first page of your submissions is displayed below.

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Assignment title: dissertation hand in  
Submission title: Perceptions and experiences of Cy..  
File name: Schofield\_TURNITIN.docx  
File size: 122.06K  
Page count: 90  
Word count: 32,789  
Character count: 176,208  
Submission date: 16-Feb-2019 11:41AM (UTC+0200)  
Submission ID: 1078826438

Cyberbullying is an emerging phenomenon among children and adolescents worldwide. Although the existing literature on cyberbullying is expanding rapidly, there is a lack of qualitative research, particularly in South Africa, which explores adolescents' perceptions of cyberbullying. Qualitative research has the potential to uncover reported dimensions which indicate and measure of cyberbullying cases which are often less visible to large-scale quantitative studies. The purpose of this study was to explore experiences and perceptions of cyberbullying amongst high school students from an Incentivized Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) perspective. These experiences and perceptions were obtained through semi-structured interviews with six high school students from a school in the South Coast of South Africa. Interview transcripts were analysed using IPA and this approach allowed the researcher to obtain a rich description of the participants' lived experiences and the processes by which they made sense of these experiences. Six representative themes were obtained from the data: (1) Perceptions of Cyberbullying and Characteristics of Cyberbullying; (2) Parent Monitoring; (3) Cyberbullying in Traditional Bullying; (4) Perceived Cyberbullying Motives; (5) Perceived Cyberbullying Motives, and finally (6) Individual, Contextual and Societal Factors. Each representative theme consisted of several sub-themes, which captured and described the participants' lived experiences. The research findings suggest that although there are similarities between traditional bullying and cyberbullying, the latter appears to have a greater psychological impact on victims. Several factors associated with the online space appear to be appealing to cyberbullies and they are subsequently motivated to perpetrate or facilitate online. Furthermore, the cyber bully's role seems to play a positive role in the phenomenon. Future research is needed and comprehensive understanding of the emotions, experiences and perceptions of high school students involved in cyberbullying.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Perceptions, Incentivized Phenomenological Analysis

## Turnitin Originality Report

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< 1% match (student papers from 06-Oct-2018)  
[Submitted to University of Leeds on 2018-10-06](#)

Cyberbullying is an emerging phenomenon among children and adolescents worldwide. Although the existing literature on cyberbullying is expanding rapidly, there is a lack of qualitative research, particularly in South Africa, which explores adolescents' perceptions of cyberbullying. Qualitative research has the potential to uncover important discourses which underlie, and nuances of, cyberbullying, ones which are often less visible in large-scale quantitative studies. The purpose of this study was to explore experiences and perceptions of cyberbullying amongst high school