The Pennsylvania State University
The Graduate School
College of Information Sciences and Technology

ONLINE AND OFFLINE BULLYING OF AUTISTIC YOUTH:
ANTI-BULLYING STRATEGIES, REPORTING, AND
TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

A Dissertation in
Information Sciences and Technology

by
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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2013
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Abstract

This dissertation investigated cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth (aged 13-18). Autism represents a neurological-developmental disability that affects language and communication, socialization, sensory processing, motor coordination, and thinking around planning, self-regulation, and self-reflection. Prior studies indicate that challenges in these areas coupled with weaker social supports can put autistic people at higher risk for bullying. Examining this concern, this study sought to address four research questions:

- **RQ1.** How does cyber- and face-to-face bullying affect the perceptions, experiences, and feelings of autistic youth?
- **RQ2.** What strategies do autistic youth use to address cyber- and face-to-face bullying?
- **RQ3:** How do autistic youth report instances of cyber- and face-to-face bullying to parents, teachers, and other authorities?
- **RQ4:** What design implications do research questions Q1-Q3 present for the development of software to teach autistic youth to address and report cyber- and face-to-face bullying?

The study adopted a mixed methodology approach. The inquiry conducted semi-structured interviews and administered a short survey with 13 autistic teens to examine their bullying experiences. Their parents also completed a longer print survey whose questions queried their children’s demographics, diagnostic history, and bullying experiences.
The analysis of data from this study informed the development of six central themes. These themes include:

T1. Bullying Shapes Autistic Youths’ Experiences, Emotions, and Perceptions
T2. Face-Face Bullying Exerts Greater Control over Physical Activities
T3. Ignoring/Avoiding Cyber- and F2F Bullying as a Defensive Strategy
T4. Parental Monitoring of Online Activities Deters Cyberbullying Threats
T5. Social-Cultural Barriers Hinder Reporting Bullying to Authorities
T6. Assistance from Allies Helping Youth Address F2F and Cyberbullying

The findings from this study carry major implications for practice. Particularly, the findings support efforts to protect autistic youth against bullying. The findings also support development of educational software to teach autistic youth how to address bullying and report it. Additionally, this study expands the growing body of research on cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth and youth with disabilities broadly.
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Acknowledgements

Support from My Dissertation Advisor and Committee Members

I thank my advisor, Dr. Shawn Clark, and my dissertation committee members: Drs. Deirdre O'Sullivan, Mary Beth Rosson, and Gerry Santoro. Shawn provided critical guidance at every stage of the development of the dissertation. He stood by me even when I hit major barriers in study design, data collection, and dissertation writing. My committee members lent me their time and service to help ensure high quality of my work.

I also thank Dean Hall, Dr. Madhu Reddy, Dr. Michael McNeese, and other administrators of the College of Information Sciences and Technology for their tremendous patience and understanding. Long-term funding assistance from the college critically enabled me to attain this doctoral degree. During my time as a teaching assistant, I had the opportunity to work alongside Dr. David Mudgett by assisting many of his courses. I greatly appreciate his wisdom and thoughtful guidance that informs my planning of long-term aspirations and goals. I learned from David many fruitful lessons in grounded instruction to improve learning.

Appreciation for Support from my Family Members

I thank my parents, Timm and Susan Robertson, for their everlasting faith in me during my graduate studies and this dissertation study. I feel very grateful for the support and assistance my parents provided to make my lengthy journey through higher education possible. They laid the foundation of my development and provided critical financial support to enable me to pursue undergraduate and
graduate studies. My parents have always seen the gifts and talents in me even when many professionals thought otherwise. I also greatly appreciate support from my siblings, Lori and Jeff, and my extended family members, including aunts, uncles, and cousins. Additionally, I feel thankful for the unconditional love of dogs Jocky and Sam during my childhood and adult life.

Ad Astra per Aspera (To the Stars through Hardships)

I thank Paul Fisher, my high school science teacher, for his tremendous inspiration of my academic and professional work. Paul taught my freshman earth science course and my two courses in computer science during junior and senior years. His selfless decision to leave NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory to teach high school courses left a very memorable impression on me. I credit Paul as a major reason for my study of computer science and related fields in undergraduate and graduate academic pursuits. He helped me begin the journey to actualize my high school alma mater’s motto of Ad Astra per Aspera (to the stars through hardships).

Assistance from My Outside Mentors

During the development of this dissertation, my mentors provided tremendous guidance, assistance, and morale support. I could not have accomplished this work without the enduring support of Barbara L. Kornblau, Stephen Kaye, and Mark Yeager. They believed in me and saw my potential to shine even when many others did not. My mentors gave me invaluable support at every stage of the dissertation’s
development and boosted my spirit at times of tumult. Most importantly, they lent their time to enable me to succeed. For that, I feel extremely appreciative.

**Support from My Friends and Colleagues**

I finally thank friends and colleagues who gave me needed morale support throughout my doctoral studies and the dissertation process. I greatly appreciate the support of: Claudia and Harold Alderman, Joanne Cafiero, Paula Durbin-Westby, Celia Feinstein, Morton Gernsbacher, Joshua Gross, Mary Hart, Michael Hernandez, Jaye Herrick, Steven Kapp, Alex Lubet, Katie McDonald, Matt Moore, Ari Ne’eman, Stan Protigal, Ralph Savarese, Russell Schaufler, Janet and Doug Schaufler, Andrew Stickney, Emily Titon, and Nina Wall. All of you stood by me, believed in me, and guided me through the high and low points of graduate study. You all taught me invaluable lessons for which I feel incredibly fortunate. I also thank friends and colleagues who supported me in my dissertation process whom I may have inadvertently left off this list.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my late uncle, Dr. Richard Eck, who inspired me to pursue a Ph.D. and continually challenge myself. Memories of the great times we spent together at the ballpark guide me always. I also dedicate this dissertation to my late grandfather, Richard H. Eck, who first introduced me to the world of computers and information technology.
Chapter 1: Introduction
Introduction

A Brief Overview of This Dissertation

This Ph.D. dissertation study investigated cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth. The first sections of this introductory chapter outline an introduction to the problem, the purpose of the study, and its guiding research questions. Thereafter, the chapter discusses the conceptual frameworks of bullying and cyberbullying that shape this study. Finally, the remaining sections of Chapter 1 describe this study’s significance, examine its limitations, and outline the next four chapters.

Introduction to the Problem

Recently, bullying has received increasingly greater attention as a major concern for school-aged youth that carries associated health and quality of life issues. This problem presents considerable implications for youth, their families, K-12 schools, and local communities. In the last decade, parents and school personnel gained a deeper understanding of their roles in preventing bullying. As recently as August 20, 2013, the United States Department of Education (USDE) recognized that “Bullying is no longer dismissed as an ordinary part of growing up.” That month, USDE sent a Dear Colleague letter to school districts to remind them about their obligations to protect students with disabilities against bullying (USDE, 2013). The letter asserts USDE policy that failure to address bullying of students with disabilities adequately can constitute a denial of their educations rights under federal law. USDE’s letter also asserts that teachers and other adults should take a lead role to send the message about the unacceptability of bullying in schools. The
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) views the impact of bullying of youth as so significant that it classifies it as a public health problem (CDC, 2011). This categorization reflects how deeply bullying can contribute to health and quality of life issues.

As new information technology matured and gained widespread use, bullying increasingly takes advantage of the affordances of that technology. During the last decade, bullying spread over the Internet and via ubiquitous smartphones, tablets, and other devices, which led to cyberbullying. The Cyberbullying Research Center (CRC), which has study cyberbullying for more than 10 years, offers one widely used definition of cyberbullying. They define cyberbullying as “when someone repeatedly harasses, mistreats, or makes fun of another person online or while using cell phones or other electronic devices” (CRC, 2013). Social networking sites on which youth frequently gather (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Instagram, etc.) contain open doors for the proliferation of this online harassment.

Similar to their vulnerability to face-to-face bullying, autistic youth particularly experience a high risk for cyberbullying due to the nature of their disability. They experience significant difficulties with face-to-face social interactions, understanding of social situations, and management of peer relationships (Dziuk, Gidley Larson, Apostu, Mahone, Denckla, et al., 2007). As a result, autistic youth frequently turn to the Internet and other information technologies to interact with others in a less socially threatening environment (Davidson, 2008). Although social networking sites provide that less threatening mode of interaction, these online platforms can expose autistic youth to
cyberbullying. When confronted with complex social situations such as bullying, autistic youth may not have the language and social skills to handle the situation properly (Carter, 2009). As a result, they may experience depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Barnhill, 2001). However, studies have not explored how this phenomenon of bullying—especially cyberbullying—affects the life perspectives, life experience, and quality of life of autistic youth. This research study begins the study of this critical phenomenon and helps expand the literature on cyberbullying of youth in general.

This study investigated cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth. This chapter outlines the purpose of the study and its guiding research questions. It presents the conceptual frameworks of bullying and cyberbullying that shape this study. The chapter also describes the significance of this study and its limitations.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study sought to explore cyber- and face-to-face bullying among autistic youth aged 13-18. Particularly, the research aimed to develop new understandings of how cyber- and face-to-face bullying affects their life perspectives, life experience, and quality of life. The study also aimed to learn about meaningful ways in which cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth differ.

Additionally, this project also sought to learn about how autistic youth address bullying and report it to authorities when it occurs. The project thus investigated their use of learned strategies to handle instances of bullying. Conducting this investigation, the study examined ways in which autistic youth elect
to report instances of bullying to authorities. The research informed the development of potential facilitators and barriers to report bullying.

To create this new knowledge about cyber and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth supported three central goals. First, this study aimed to assist policymakers and practitioners as they address bullying of autistic youth. Second, this work helped grow the literature on cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth to inform future research. Third, the knowledge gained from this study supported the process to design new educational software. This educational software can teach autistic youth strategies to address cyber- and face-to-face bullying and report it to authorities.

To achieve these goals this research study adopted mixed methodology and an interpretive research lens. The study used semi-structured interviews with autistic youth as its primary method. For the secondary and tertiary methods, surveys with autistic youth and their parents captured complementary qualitative and quantitative data.

**Research Questions**

Planning this study, the researcher sought to define key focus areas to investigate. This process led to the development of four research questions to guide the work of this dissertation study:

**RQ1.** How does bullying affect the perceptions and experiences of autistic youth (aged 13-18)?
How do these perceptions and experiences of autistic youth (aged 13-18) differ for cases of face-to-face bullying compared with online (cyber) bullying?

**RQ2.** What strategies do autistic youth (aged 13-18) employ to address and cyber- and face-to-face bullying? How do these strategies enhance their resiliency and fortitude? How do autistic youths’ use of strategies to address bullying shape their perspectives, feelings, and experiences?

**RQ3.** How do autistic youth (aged 13-18) report instances of cyber- and face-to-face bullying to parents, teachers, and other authorities? Which of these groups of adults do they seek out to report bullying? How does autistic youths’ reporting of instances of bullying shape their perspectives, feelings, and experiences?

**RQ4.** What design implications do research questions Q1-Q3 present for the use of information technologies to teach autistic youth to address and report cyber- and face-to-face bullying?

This study sought to gain a better understanding for each of these research questions. To accomplish this goal the study conducted interviews and surveys with autistic youth and their parents.

**Bullying: Conceptual Framework and Key Characteristics**

Bullying represents a repetitive form of aggression that targets vulnerable adults and youth. Fueled by psychological, physical, or social dominance, this aggression
draws from large power imbalances between bullies and their victims. These power imbalances occur most frequently in highly structured and populated social settings, such as schools, workplaces, and prisons (Monks, Smith, Naylor, Barter, Ireland, & Coyne, 2009). In addition to power imbalances, four other key factors define bullying under the conceptual framework of Marini, Fairbairn, and Zuber (2001). These factors include: 1) repeated actions, 2) deliberate harmful intent, 3) generation of fear and anxiety, and 4) secretive nature. Table 1-1 below outlines descriptions of these criteria and presents contextual examples:

<p>| <strong>Table 1-1: Five Factors that Define Bullying</strong> |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Factor</strong></th>
<th><strong>Description</strong></th>
<th><strong>Examples</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1. Power Differentials between a bully and a victim</td>
<td>The bully possesses a high degree of power (leverage) and control over a victim.</td>
<td>Physical size (height/weight);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2. Repeated Actions over an extended period of time</td>
<td>The bully repeatedly harasses the victim over an extended period.</td>
<td>Weekly bullying in class; Monthly playground bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3. Deliberate Intent to Control and Harm</td>
<td>The bully intends to exert strong control over the victim. The bully seeks to harm the victim physically, emotionally, or psychologically.</td>
<td>Steals lunch money to produce crying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4. Generates Anxiety, Intimidation, and Fear</td>
<td>The bully’s actions instill anxiety, intimidation, and fear in the victim.</td>
<td>Fear of returning to school; Increased social anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5. Secretive in Nature</td>
<td>The bully makes considerable effort to hide bullying from authority figures or other individuals.</td>
<td>Lying to a principal about bullying; Covering up evidence of bullying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Marini, Fairbairn, and Zuber (2001), three kinds of actors participate in these bullying activities: bullies, victims, and bystanders. Bullies attack or assist in attacks upon victims. Victims receive the attacks of bullies. Bystanders stand by while bullying acts occur without intervening to help victims (Marini, Fairbairn, & Zuber (2001).

Four Types of Bullying

Marini, Fairbairn, & Zuber (2001) also outline four types of bullying that involve these four actors: physical, cognitive, social, and emotional. Table 1-2 below describes each of these four types of bullying. It also presents a short description of each and specific examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Bullying</th>
<th>Short Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Bullying</td>
<td>Open attacks that involve direct or indirect physical contact</td>
<td>Shoving, punching, kicking, spitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Bullying</td>
<td>Verbal attacks</td>
<td>Taunting, teasing, ridiculing, threatening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Bullying</td>
<td>Encouraging or daring someone to engage in risky behavior to participate in a social group</td>
<td>Daring a member of a popular social subgroup (e.g., student athlete) to use drugs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emotional Bullying

Secretive attacks to induce emotional reaction

Spreading rumors, posting signs with special messages for the victim, sending unsigned letters, making obscene phone calls

Adapted from Marini, Fairbairn, & Zuber, 2001)

Physical bullying typically occurs when a bully exerts a difference in size or strength to dominate a victim (Marini, Fairbairn, & Zuber, 2001). This dominance can result from greater height, weight, muscular strength, or other physical disparity. Frequently, physical bullying involves direct actions, such as kicking, punching, tripping, pinching, and pushing. However, physical bullying can also involve activities in which a bully does not directly touch a victim. For instance, bullies might spit at victims, throw items at them (e.g., food), or steal their belongings (e.g., backpack, lunch money) (Marini, Fairbairn, & Zuber, 2001).

Cognitive bullying, on the other hand, relies on psychological or socio-psychological dominance over a victim (Marini, Fairbairn, & Zuber, 2001). Intending to arouse emotional reactions in victims, bullies might hurl insults at their victims. In many cases, these insults reflect perceived weaknesses of victims’ appearance, social standing, or academic/work performance. Alternatively, bullies might speak
key trigger phrases known by them to stir a reaction in their victims (Marini, Fairbairn, & Zuber, 2001).

Bullies who engage in social bullying aim to cause victims harm by pressing them to engage in risky behavior (Marini, Fairbairn, & Zuber, 2001). This risky behavior might involve societal risks, such as using illegal or otherwise illicit drugs (e.g., prescription medication prescribed for someone else). Alternatively, social bullying might involve other risks that could get victims in trouble at school, such as cheating on tests and term papers (Marini, Fairbairn, & Zuber, 2001).

Emotional bullying represents efforts by bullies to harm the social standings of victims (Marini, Fairbairn, & Zuber, 2001). Bullies spread rumors or gossip about victims or gossip around the school, workplace, or community setting. These rumors or gossip generally consist of lies, exaggerations, or distortions of a victim’s activities or background. In some cases, bullies might write rumors or gossip on building surfaces (e.g., walls, restrooms) or other objects (e.g., desks, tables) (Marini, Fairbairn, & Zuber, 2001).

Bullying Prevalence Among K-12 Students and High-Risk Subgroups

Internationally, millions of students in primary and secondary schools frequently experience bullying. Depending on how studies define bullying, the prevalence of bullying among these K-12 students can widely differ. However, most estimates indicate that about 10 to 30 percent of K-12 students in the U.S. and other industrialized countries experience cyber- or face-to-face bullying (Smith, 1999; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, et al., 2001; Campbell, 2005;
Among these K-12 students, two particular subgroups face higher bullying risks. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) students experience greater bullying because of anti-gay attitudes. Widespread exclusion of LGBT-specific provisions from anti-bullying and discrimination laws in many states compounds this situation (Bully Police, 2011). Additionally, students with disabilities likewise face a greater risk for bullying. Students with disabilities that affect mobility, communication, and other activities of living experience bullying more often than their non-disabled peers do (Carter & Spencer, 2006).

**Health Associations between Bullying and K-12 Students’ Lives**

Bullied in school, their local communities, and other settings, K-12 students face adverse circumstances that can affect their health and well-being. They report greater sleep difficulties, feelings of insecurity, loneliness, and unhappiness. Bullied children also experience higher incidences of psychosomatic illnesses, such as headaches, backache, and abdominal pain, and poor appetite. Additionally, bullied children report greater challenges with psychiatric disabilities, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009).

Bullied children also face long-term negative effects that extend into their adult lives. Adults bullied in childhood report lower levels of self-esteem and greater difficulties with their social relationships. They also report higher rates of anxiety, including social phobias, agoraphobia, generalized anxiety, and panic disorder.
(Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013). Bullying in childhood can also put victims at an elevated risk for suicide throughout adult life (Klomek, Sourander, & Gould, 2010).

**Cyberbullying: Definition and Key Characteristics**

*Definition of Cyberbullying*

Historically, bullying required in-person interactions between bullies and their victims. However, the impact of the Internet and mobile communication on modern society greatly altered this situation. Increasingly, bullies use social media available over the Internet and mobile communications networks to target their victims at a distance. These cyberbullying attacks can occur via texting, listservs, gaming platforms, social networks, and many other electronic platforms.

The Cyberbullying Research Center (CRC) provides one widely used definition for cyberbullying. The CRC represents a joint research initiative run by professors at Florida Atlantic University and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Their research team defines cyberbullying as “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices” (CRC, 2010). Oriented from the perspective of criminology, the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) offers another widely used definition of cyberbullying. The NCPC defines cyberbullying as “when the Internet, cell-phones, or other devices are used to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person” (NCPC, 2010). Common synonyms for this harm inflicted through cyberbullying include electronic bullying, e-bullying, online bullying, digital bullying, and Internet bullying. Cyberbullying via text messages often goes by two additional synonyms:
SMS bullying and mobile bullying (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2009).

*Prevalence of Cyberbullying among K-12 Students*

Most studies of this phenomenon found that cyberbullying activities affect between 9 and 35 percent of adolescent children (aged 10 to 18). However, some studies reported higher prevalence rates for cyberbullying. The differences in how studies chose to define and characterize cyberbullying likely accounted for this wide range in prevalence figures. The most common vectors through which cyberbullies target victims include chat rooms, instant messages and text messages, webcams, emails, forums, and blogs (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007; Li, 2007a; Li, 2007b; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007; Williams & Guerra, 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008a; Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

*Types of Cyberbullying*

A study conducted by Vandebosch & Van Cleemput (2009) categorizes cyberbullying activities across these media into nine types. These nine categories include property destruction, verbal harassment, nonverbal harassment, social harassment, masquerades, rumors and gossip, revealing confidential information, and polling. Table 1-3 below describes these nine types of cyberbullying and presents contextual examples:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cyberbullying Type</th>
<th>Short Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property Destruction</td>
<td>Transmitting malware to harm a victim’s electronic devices</td>
<td>Viruses, Trojan Horses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Harassment</td>
<td>Using an electronic device to insult, taunt, or threaten a victim with verbal messages</td>
<td>Threatening text messages; Insulting emails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal Harassment</td>
<td>Using an electronic device to insult, taunt, or threaten a victim with videos, audio recordings, images, or animations</td>
<td>Obscene images; Threatening Videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Harassment</td>
<td>Hindering the victim’s social participation</td>
<td>Exclusion from an afterschool social club;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masquerades</td>
<td>Adopting the persona of a non-existent person</td>
<td>Posing as a false girlfriend or boyfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumors and gossip</td>
<td>Spreading electronic rumors and gossip</td>
<td>Spreading rumors about a victim’s sexual activity;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revealing confidential information</td>
<td>Outing confidential or other trusted information about the victim</td>
<td>A victim’s home address and phone number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling</td>
<td>Producing a defamatory online poll to tarnish the victim’s standing</td>
<td>Creating and spreading polls to vote on a victim’s appearance or popularity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Vandebosch & Van Cleemput (2009)

**Face-to-Face and Cyber-Bullying of Autistic Youth and Adults**

Autism represents a neurological-developmental disability diagnosed among millions of children and adults in the U.S. and other countries of the world. Autistic people possess diverse strengths and weaknesses and individual differences that vary how they experience the disability. However, all autistic people fit a common cognitive profile. This profile describes the degree and intensity of traits in four core areas:

- Language and Communication
- Socialization and Social Relationships
- Sensory Experience and Motor Skills
- Planning, Self-Regulation, and Self-Reflection

(NZMHE, 2008)
Language and Communication

Autistic people often experience many difficulties with both receptive language (language comprehension) and expressive language. Frequently, a large gap exists between their ability to understand other people and to express themselves (Mirenda, 2003). Autistic people might possess relative strengths or weaknesses with either task. Additionally, their communication challenges with understanding and expressing can involve nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, gestures, and postures. In some cases, autistic people use intricate vocabularies and possess an extensive factual knowledge that can mask their difficulties with communication (Mirenda, 2003).

Socialization and Social Relationships

Autistic people often find it a major challenge to socialize with other people in everyday activities. Frequently relying on rules of thumb to manage social interactions, they can feel perplexed by ambiguous and subjective “unwritten social rules” (Dziuk, Gidley Larson, Apostu, Mahone, Denckla, et al., 2007). New life situations and situations in which they do not know ‘what comes next’ can present the greatest difficulty. Autistic people can also find it hard to form and maintain friendships and other social relationships because of their socialization challenges (Dziuk, Gidley, Larson, Apostu, Mahone, Denckla, et al., 2007).
Atypical Sensory Experience

Autistic people commonly feel and experience sensations from the seven senses (five plus two) differently from non-autistic people (Leekham, Nieto, Libby, Wing, & Gould, 2007; Wiggins, Robins, Bakeman, & Adamson, 2009). These seven senses consist of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, as well as balance (vestibular), and body motion (proprioception). Compared with non-autistic peers, autistic people may experience hypersensitivity (over-sensitivity) in reaction to some sensations and hyposensitivity (under-sensitivity) to other sensations (Leekham, Nieto, Libby, Wing, & Gould, 2007; Wiggins, Robins, Bakeman, & Adamson, 2009). For instance, an autistic person might have highly sensitive hearing that makes clapping feel painful, but a less sensitive sense of motion. Another autistic person might have under-sensitive touch but a hypersensitive sense of olfactory and taste sensations.

Autistic people may seek out certain sensations and avoid other sensations. For instance, an autistic person might avoid others’ shoulder touches (tactile avoidance), but greatly enjoy riding roller coasters (vestibular seeking). In contrast, another autistic individual might wish to touch everything in a physical environment (tactile seeking), while fearing airplane turbulence (vestibular avoidance). These atypical sensory experiences can differently affect an autistic person’s emotional and mental state, mental health, and quality of life. Additionally, atypical sensory experiences can affect an autistic person’s perception of pain, temperature, and hunger or thirst.
Motor Skills and Coordination

While managing these atypical sensory experiences, autistic people must also address challenges that arise with fine and gross motor skills and coordination (Barnhill, Hagiwara, Myles, Simpson, Brick, & Griswold, 2000; Myles & Simpson, 2002; Volkmar et al., 1996). They frequently find it hard to plan and perform complex tasks that rely on fine motor skills, such as handwriting. Autistic people also often face difficulties with complex tasks that rely on gross motor skills, such as catching and throwing a ball. Some autistic people possess unusual postures and gaits.

Planning, Self-Regulation, and Self-Reflection

Autistic people tend to have difficulties with cognitively demanding and goal-oriented tasks that require complex planning and organization (Prelock, 2006). Executive functioning difficulties may manifest as difficulties dealing with shifts in attention and multi-tasking activities. Autistic people often get distracted from the task at hand and intensely direct their focus and attention toward subjects and tasks of interest to them. Commonly, autistic people may also have difficulty regulating and reflecting on their emotions, mental states, thoughts, and actions (Prelock, 2006).

Relationship to Bullying Victimization

The challenges that autistic people experience in these four domains discussed above can put them at increased risk for bullying victimization. Recognizing
challenges with motor skills and coordination, bullies might target autistic youth in physical education classes. This victimization could take the form of taunts about decreased athletic prowess or harassment during athletic activities. Additionally, bullies might attack engage in physical attacks against autistic youth with weaker physical abilities during school and off-school time. Noticing difficulties with socialization, bullies might target autistic students who find it challenging to fit into the school social scene. Bullies might particularly elect to victimize autistic students with fewer close friendships.

**Definitions of Terms**

*ADD/ADHD*: A neurological disability that affects attention and executive functioning (Reiersen & Todd, 2008)

*Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)*: Non-speech forms of communication used by people with disabilities, such as letter boards, sign language, speech-generating typing devices, and picture systems (Light, Roberts, Dimarco, & Greiner, 1998)

*Autism (noun)*: A diverse neurological-developmental disability that affects communication, socialization, motor coordination, sensory processing, and some areas of executive functioning (NZMHE, 2008)

*Autism (adjective)*: A descriptor for information about the disability of autism and all stakeholders surrounding the disability (e.g., the autism community) (Robertson, 2007; Robertson & Ne’eman, 2008)
Autistic (adjective): A descriptor for persons who carry an identification of autism and for initiatives led or organized by those persons (e.g., autistic community) (Robertson, 2007; Robertson & Ne’eman, 2008)

Focused Interest (aka special interest): Highly passionate interests that autistic people adopt and to which autistic people devote intense engagement, attention, time, and energy (NZMHE, 2008)

Inclusion (in education): Supported by appropriate services, students with disabilities participate in classes with their non-disabled peers for some or all of the school day (Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, Solomon, & Sirota, 2001)

Mixed receptive/language disorder: A neurological disability that affects the ability to express communication and understand others (NZMHE, 2008)

Oppositional Defiant Disorder: A psychiatrically diagnosed condition characterized by pervasive disobedience, hostility, and defiant behavior toward authorities (NZMHE, 2008)

Relationship: A social connection between two persons described by shared sets of interactions, experiences, and perspectives between them (Jobe & White, 2007)

The Researcher: A reference to the principal investigator of this dissertation study

Tourette Syndrome: A neurological disability characterized by involuntary motor tics (e.g., eye blinks, head jerks) and vocal/phonic tics (e.g., throat clearing, barking) (Canitano & Vivanti, 2007).
Youth: For the purposes of this study, adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old

Assumptions of the Study

Organizing this study, the researcher made several important assumptions about cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth. These assumptions include:

- Direct, first-hand insight into autistic youths’ perspectives, experiences, and understanding can enhance knowledge of how cyber- and face-to-face bullying affects them.
- Autistic youth develop insights into their negative life experiences with cyber- and face-to-face bullying victimization. They can also share these insights with others.
- Autistic youth participating in this study can recall and articulate memories about their real-world experiences with bullying victimization.
- Autistic youth participating in this study can share their beliefs and perspectives regarding their experiences with cyber- and face-to-face bullying.
- Autistic youth participating in this study can describe strategies they use to address bullying and report it to authorities.
- Parents of autistic youth participating in this study can share complementary information about their children’s background and experiences with bullying. The parents can report their children’s comfort with communicating and socializing with peers. They can articulate comments that facilitate meaningful understanding of their children’s experiences with bullying. Additionally,
parents can describe ways in which they seek to protect their children from online harm.

**Significance of Conducting this Study**

This research study of cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth presents significant implications for practice and policy. Additionally, this work also offers major implications for research in this area. The following sections describe specific aspects of the significance of this study for practice/policy and research.

**Implications for Practice and Policymaking**

This study informs government policies and professional practices to protect autistic youth against face-to-face and cyber- bullying. The inquiry carried out for this study explored autistic youths’ use of strategies to deal with bullying. The investigation also examined how they report instances of bullying to parents, teachers, and other authorities. Knowledge generated from the findings of this investigation assists policy and practice on how to teach autistic youth to handle and report bullying. Additionally, this study explored the perspectives and feelings of autistic youth regarding their experiences with cyber- and face-to-face bullying.

**Implications for Educational Technology Development**

This study assisted a long-term project to design and develop new software about bullying. This software aims to teach autistic youth new strategies to address cyber- and face-to-face bullying as it occurs. Additionally, this software seeks to help
autistic youth learn how to report instances of bullying to teachers, parents, and other authorities. Supporting these goals, this study represented the first of a series of inquiries to facilitate the creation of this new software.

**Implications for Research**

This study contributes to the growing research literature on cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth. Particularly, this study adds a novel contribution of how autistic youth use strategies to address bullying and how they report it to authorities. This contribution informs future research in this area concerning autistic youth, as well as youth with disabilities more broadly. Additionally, this study contributes a study to the literature that adopted qualitative methods as its primary method of inquiry. Few studies in the research literature on autism have investigated any phenomena through interviews with autistic people themselves. This study adds to the growing body of literature that taps their first-hand perspectives and experiences to inform research and practice.

**Limitations of Conducting this Study**

The researcher anticipated several major challenges that might arise while interviewing autistic youth about their experiences with bullying. First, autistic youth often find it hard to converse with other people because of their difficulties with communication and socialization. By their nature, interviews as a research method rely on lengthy conversations that examine experiences and perspectives. Thus, the participants of this study could have difficulties conversing with the researcher during an interview and recalling past memories of bullying.
victimization. Seeking to minimize this issue, the researcher incorporated a communication requirement into the eligibility criteria for the study. All participants had to possess sufficient communication and socialization abilities to converse with the interview for a thirty to forty minute interview.

Second, the researcher anticipated that prospective participants might feel uncomfortable to discuss their experiences with bullying during an interview. These experiences carry an association with distressing or traumatic memories that many autistic youth wish to forget. Addressing this issue, the researcher determined that to share his past experiences with bullying during the interview could help establish rapport. Autistic youth would likely relate better to another person who experienced bullying and feel less stressed to discuss their specific experiences with bullying. The researcher also sought to help participants feel more comfortable to share their experiences. The interviews conducted with participants allowed them extra time to think about and process their responses to questions asked of them.

**Rundown of Following Chapters (Chapters 2-5)**

The four chapters that follow this introductory chapter capture the remaining elements of this dissertation project. Chapter 2 examines the theoretical frameworks and literature review that guided this study of cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth. Chapter 3 reviews the methodology that this study adopted to investigate this topic. This chapter outlines the research design, study eligibility criteria, data collection and analysis procedures, human subject protections, and measures of rigor. Chapter 4 describes the findings of this study, including descriptive characteristics of the study sample and themes identified.
Finally, Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the meaning of these findings and of this dissertation study's implications for research and practice. This chapter analyzes the meaning of each theme identified, describes known limitations of the study, and examines reflexive considerations. Chapter 5 also discusses implications of this study for practice and contributions it makes to the research literature.

**Summary of Chapter 1**

This first chapter of the dissertation offered an overview of the study of cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth. This chapter laid out the fundamental elements of cyber- and face-to-face bullying and its impact on autistic youth. The chapter narrative then examined the purpose of this study and its guiding research questions.
Chapter 2: Explanatory Theory and Literature Review
Theoretical Frameworks and Literature Review

Overview

This chapter first reviews the model of disability and explanatory theories of bullying that guided this study. The researcher then examines in depth literature relevant to this study. This literature spans existing policies and practices to address bullying, and face-to-face and cyber-bullying of autistic youth.

Socio-Ecological Model of Disability

Historically, an individual-deficit model of disability shaped how people viewed the human experience of disability in research and practice. This individual-deficit model of disability emphasizes that people with disabilities lack the abilities of non-disabled people (Robertson, 2010). This disparity underlies a set of deficits that lead to all the disabling challenges experienced by people with disabilities. Under this view, a person who uses a wheelchair cannot enter a building entrance dependent on stairs because of the inability to walk. Likewise, a person with a disability who has difficulty with communication and socialization faces those problems solely because of deficits in those areas.

In stark contrast, social models of disability suggest that socio-cultural elements of human society shape barriers faced by people with disabilities (Abberley, 1987, Bogdan, & Taylor, 1989; Hughes, & Peterson, 1997; Goodley, 2001; Burchardt, 2004; Hughes, 2007). Under these views, building entrances dependent on stairs reflect social values that prioritize the ability to walk. Therein, these types
of social norms lead to disabling challenges experienced by people with disabilities. Likewise, a person with a disability who experiences challenges in communication and socialization faces those obstacles at least partially because of barriers created by socio-cultural norms.

Developed for this research study, the Socio-Ecological Model of the Disability Human Experience (SEMDHE) guides the work. This model of disability aligns both with the interpretive epistemology and the constructivist ontology that underline the researcher's worldview. Critically, this socio-ecological model fuses elements of a social model of disability together with an understanding of individual differences. This fusion leads to four main components that underlie the human experience of people with disabilities. The socio-ecological model posits that disabling challenges can emerge from when these four main forces interact. Likewise, the model also posits that the disability human experience emerges from the interaction of the four forces. Table 2-1 below describes the four main components of SCMDHE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Physical Environment</td>
<td>Physical environments contain affordances, barriers, and neutral elements that affect how people interact with each other and conduct their everyday lives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Human interactions adhere to certain social dynamics guided by the exchange of beliefs and values and the manner of interaction (e.g., modality).

Individual Differences

Individuals possess unique differences that underlie how they interact with others, including abilities, weaknesses, and attributes (e.g., appearance, beliefs, values, etc.).

Societal and Socio-Cultural Norms

A society and its contributing cultures generate shared norms that affect how people interact with each other and the surrounding physical environment.

**Explanatory Theories of Bullying**

Monks, Smith, Naylor, Barter, Ireland, et al (2009) conducted a comprehensive review of all literature on bullying published between 1984 and 2009. They sought to identify factors and explanatory theories about how bullying occurs in structured social environments, such as schools, workplaces, and prisons. Their review uncovered a combination of individual and social theoretical frameworks used to explain bullying. Table 2-2 below outlines these five main theories of bullying and their associated evidence from the existing research literature:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory Name</th>
<th>Individual/Social</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evolutionary</td>
<td>Social and</td>
<td>Aggressive human actions that contribute to bullying behavior developed as an adaptive role for humans in early society.</td>
<td>The literature generally does not support this theory. However, the authors suggest that the theory contributes to the understanding that bullying carries adaptive costs and benefits for individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment Theory</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>The quality of attachment to parents/caregivers influences the individual’s development of a lifelong model of social relationships. This model of social relationships influences bullying behavior.</td>
<td>The literature provides some support for this view, particularly for understandings of continuity and discontinuity of bullying behavior across different eras.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Learning</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individuals learn bullying behavior through social learning activities that include observation, role modeling, and reinforcement.</td>
<td>The literature provides some support for this view, particularly for the understanding of how adult role models can influence how children engage in bullying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Social Cognitive Theory

| Individual | The unique manner in which individuals cognitively process social information and social cues contributes to their engagement in bullying. | The literature provides some support for this view, particularly for the understanding of how a bully's adaptive social skills can influence their bullying behavior. |

### Socio-Cultural Theory

| Social | Situational factors (e.g., organizational culture, norms of an environment, conditions of a physical situation) can influence the engagement in bullying. | The literature provides the most extensive support for this view. Bullying has the highest prevalence in authoritarian organizations with rigid hierarchies, such as schools, workplaces, and prisons. |

Recognizing that socio-cultural theories carry the strongest evidence from the literature, this dissertation study adopted a modified version of this theoretical lens to guide the work. The Socio-Ecological Bullying Model (SEBM) developed by this dissertation's researcher integrates elements from the other four theories in areas where they do have meaningful justification from studies on bullying. Table 2-3 below presents this descriptive socio-ecological model of bullying:
**Table 2-3: The Socio-Ecological Bullying Model (SEBM)**

[framework developed by this dissertation's researcher to guide this study]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Derived from</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Policies, Norms, and Rules</td>
<td>An organization's policies, norms, and rules can create some of the preconditions for bullying behavior.</td>
<td>Social-Cultural Theories of Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Structure</td>
<td>Bullying tends to develop in organizations with rigid social hierarchies and authoritarianism</td>
<td>Social-Cultural Theories of Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interconnected Interactions</td>
<td>Bullying exists within a complex web of social interaction in which bullies can engage in bullying and become victims of others' bullying.</td>
<td>Social-Cultural Theories of Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-Cognitive Understanding</td>
<td>The social cognition of bullies can influence how, whether, and when they engage in bullying behavior.</td>
<td>Social Cognitive Theories of Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Modeling</td>
<td>Bullies learn to bully through observations, role modeling, and reinforcement of others around them.</td>
<td>Social Learning Theories of Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model of Social Relationships</td>
<td>Bullies’ understanding of social relationships can influence how, whether, and when they engage in bullying behavior.</td>
<td>Attachment Theories of Bullying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Costs and Rewards

Bullying yields a defined set of rewards and costs for bullies.

Evolutionary Theories of Bullying

Cyberbullying Framework

A review of the literature also informed the ongoing development of a descriptive framework of cyberbullying by the researcher. This framework describes elements of cyberbullying that differentiate it from face-to-face bullying. Table 2-4 below presents this framework:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dis-inhibition</td>
<td>The nature of online interaction (e.g., via the Internet, cellphones) can lead persons to develop a heightened sense of safety and a lessened fear of consequences. This phenomenon of dis-inhibition can influence online harassment, including cyberbullying.</td>
<td>Writing an anonymous nasty email to someone else from a specially setup email account not otherwise used for other purposes to decrease trail of identity for the message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Residue</td>
<td>The nature of online communication and online social interaction means that cyberbullying can quickly leave a complex electronic trail facilitated by the ease of copying and sharing information electronically over the Internet and other networks</td>
<td>Multiple copies of the same post on an online forum scattered throughout several websites and placed additionally on online social networks (e.g., Facebook, Google+)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
24/7 Susceptibility to Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can potentially occur at any time of day and on any day of the week. Cyberbullies targeting victims with text bombs sent at 3 am.

Global Audiences for Cyberbullies to Target Victims

Cyberbullying can target victims at a distance from any location in which cyberbullies have a connection to the Internet or mobile networks or have proxies who do (who can post messages for them)

Transmitting obscene and profane images to a victim’s cellphone from 5,000 miles away

Computer/Electronic Literacy as a Factor in Cyberbullying Power Imbalances

The nature of electronic devices means that greater literacy with those devices can facilitate the power imbalance at the center of cyberbullying attacks

Extensive knowledge of an iPhone smartphone informs cyberbullying via a virus to disrupt the device’s functioning

Lack of Nonverbal Cues in Online Interaction Shapes the Manner of Cyberbullying

Communication over the Internet and other online networks often contains fewer nonverbal cues (e.g., body language, tone of voice) than face-to-face communication

Reliance of Internet-based communication on textual information shapes a different nature of cyberbullying that can distinguish it from face-to-face bullying

Wishart, 2004; Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007; Sharriff, & Hoff, 2007; Chaffin, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008b; Heirman & Walrave, 2008; Livingston, 2008; Livingston & Haddon, 2008; Mason, 2008; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Cranmer, Selwyn & Potter, 2009; Englander, Mills, & McCoy, 2009; Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009; De Souza & Dick, 2009; Livingston & Blake, 2010; Erdur-Baker, 2010)

Anti-Bullying Policies and Programs

Practice and policymakers need to review existing policy and practice to address bullying. Additionally, research questions two and three involve use of anti-bullying strategies and reporting of bullying. This focus area has a growing body of academic and professional literature that provides insight for policymakers and program developers.
Policymakers often advocate for or enact disability-focused anti-bullying policies. These policies assert that bullying victimization of students with disabilities denies their legal right to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (ED, 2013). States, school districts, schools, and communities have also enacted broader policies and laws on bullying for students with and without disabilities. These policies and laws assert that bullying victimization violates children’s dignity and their educational and human rights (Monks, Smith, Naylor, Barter, Ireland, et al, 2009).

Forty-nine states in the U.S. now have anti-bullying laws. (BP, 2013a). Bully Police USA, a nonprofit organization, operates a website (BP, 2013a) that maintains information on these state anti-bullying laws and monitors pending anti-bullying legislation. This site also evaluates anti-bullying laws on their utility for reducing bullying. They apply a 13-element grading rubric to evaluate state anti-bullying laws (BP, 2013b). Six states’ anti-bullying laws (Arizona, Connecticut, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska) received grades below a B. Eleven states’ anti-bullying laws (Alabama, California, Colorado, Kansas, North Carolina, New Mexico, Nevada, New York, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Wisconsin) received a B or B+. The other thirty-two states’ anti-bullying laws received grades between an A- and an A++. (Montana does not have a state anti-bullying law as of 2013.) (Pivik, Mccommas, & Laflamme, 2002; Limber & Small, 2003; Secunda, 2005; Srabstein, Berkman, & Pyntikova, 2007; Ferster & Ellis, 2008; Dayton & Dupre, 2009; Blackmore, 2009; Sacks & Salem, 2009).
After enacting state anti-bullying laws, sufficient enforcement of these laws at the school district, school, and local community levels may prove challenging. States with both large populations and land areas (e.g. California, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, etc.) contain hundreds of school districts and thousands of public schools whose local policies on bullying differ widely. These states can find it difficult to enforce anti-bullying policies across all districts and schools, particularly when inter-district and inter-school communication channels operate inadequately.

Many school districts and individual schools have also specifically developed and implemented anti-bullying programs. These anti-bullying programs might focus on transforming school climate that precipitates bullying. One particularly popular anti-bullying program that targets school climate is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) developed by psychologist Dan Olweus and his research team at the University of Bergen in Norway. OBPP emphasizes teaching bystanders to assist victims of bullying. The Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life at Clemson University in South Carolina has trained more than 700 professionals located in 40 states and Washington D.C. to implement OBPP for school districts and individual schools. Evidence for the effectiveness of OBPP in these school districts and schools is mixed. Although many evaluations of OBPP validate the program’s effectiveness in reducing instances of bullying, one recent large-scale study did not. This study involved a non-randomized, controlled trial with 10 middle schools in Washington State. Lack of demonstrable success of OBPP in this study may reflect a greater problem of how to measure effectiveness of anti-bullying programs given numerous real-world variables, constraints, and confounds affecting their implementation and
evaluation (e.g. variances in student demographics, differences in school climate and culture, differences in the attitudes of teachers and staff, etc.) (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; Olweus, 2005; Black & Jackson, 2007; Bauer, Lozano, & Rivara, 2007; Clemson, 2009; Black, Washington, Trent, Harner, & Pollock, 2010).

Student reporting of bullying victimization constitutes an integral component of anti-bullying strategies. The literature of circumstances under which students choose to report school bullying remains scant, but growing. Recent studies have identified several factors that influence student reporting of bullying.

Chronically bullied students are more likely to report bullying than infrequently bullied students; those who experience only a few incidences of victimization by a particular bully are less likely to report victimization by that bully. School climate, family context, gender, and ethnicity represent additional factors for students’ decision to report bullying. Students who believe that school officials (teachers and staff) explicitly tolerate bullying in their schools are less likely to report victimization. Students whose parents adopt coercive parenting skills are less likely to report bullying. Male students are less likely to report bullying than females because they possess less interest in seeking social support.

Additionally, students from ethnic minority populations seem less likely to report chronic bullying at school; one study (Sawyer, Bradshaw, & Brennan, 2008) found this to be true for many black and Asian-American students. The authors argued that cultural differences among black and Asian-American students might account for this phenomenon (Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2004; Unnever & Cornell, 2004; Williams & Cornell, 2006; Nabuzoka, Rønning, & Handegård, 2009).
It remains uncertain how presence of disabilities among victims of school bullying affects their reporting of bullying. No known studies have examined this topic. Autistic students could be less likely to report bullying due to several factors (referenced earlier in this paper). These factors include:

- Difficulties in articulation of autobiographical memories have been found among some autistic people, which may affect their ability to recall accurately experiences with victimization.
- Difficulties in interpreting emotions, feelings, and deeply emotive experiences among autistic people may also affect their reporting of victimization (Kaliouby & Robinson, 2005; Bruck, London, Landa, & Goodman, 2007; Lacava, Golan, Baron-Cohen, & Myles, 2007; Crane & Goddard, 2008)

K-12 Education for Autistic Students

The Individuals with Disabilities Education (Improvement) Act of 2004 (usually known as IDEA) mandates that all eligible students with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) through completion of secondary studies or age 21. If these students choose to attend public school, schools must educate them in the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible. Depending on a student’s individualized education plan, this educational placement can vary widely. Some students with disabilities spend most or all of their school days fully included among their peers with disabilities. Other students with disabilities only take some classes alongside their peers with disabilities. In some cases, students with disabilities have educational plans that place them in separate schools or programs only for children
with disabilities. They might spend little or no time in classes or activities alongside their peers without disabilities. The concept of LRE means that schools must prioritize the most inclusive educational setting in which a student can thrive academically and socially.

Although IDEA requires K-12 public schools to identify proactively students with disabilities and monitor their educational progress, autistic students are sometimes under-identified in K-12 education. Some schools identify autistic students with primary disability identifications other than autism (e.g. learning disabilities). Other autistic students have not received any disability identification. This situation partially results from variations in assessments and educational legislation among states and local school districts. Under-representation of autistic students from ethnic, socio-economic, and geographic (e.g. urban, rural, suburban) diversities presents an additional factor. Students from ethnic minority populations, rural regions, and poor communities are less likely to receive an accurate identification on the autism spectrum during their K-12 school years. After they are diagnosed, this sub-group of autistic students can sometimes face a lower likelihood to receive appropriate educational services because of insufficient service infrastructure and cultural/linguistic barriers (Laidler, 2005; Mandell, Novak, & Zubritsky, 2005; Safran, 2008; Begeer, Bouk, Boussaid, Terwogt, & Koot, 2009).
K-12 and Community Bullying of Autistic Youth and Adults

Overview of the Bullying Experiences of Autistic Youth and Adults

The literature on bullying of autistic adults and youth grew considerably during the last several years. Existing studies report that specific characteristics of this disability may contribute to a greater risk for bullying compared with non-autistic people. These findings corroborate accounts of bullying of autistic people found in books by professionals and advocates (e.g., Heinrichs, 2003; Webb, 2003; Gray, 2004; Thorpe, 2005; Dubin, 2007; Stobard, 2009). Additionally, the growing body of research also concurs with autobiographies and reflections by autistic adults and youth (e.g., O’Neill, 1999; Jackson, 2002; Prince-Hughes, 2002; Gerland, 2003; Shore, 2003).

Bullies often prey upon individuals and groups they perceive as visibly vulnerable. Atypical traits among autistic people that bullies commonly target include communication and social cognition difficulties, physical awkwardness, atypical sensory responses, intensely focused interests, atypical motor mannerisms, and repetitive inclinations (Cole, 1997; Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, Solomon, & Sirota, 2001; Tsatsanis, 2003; Attwood, 2004; Campbell, Ferguson, Herzinger, Jackson, & Marino, 2004; Bottroff, Slee, & Zeitz, 2005; Van Cleave & Davis, 2006; Kunihira, Senju, Dairoku, Wakabayaski, & Hasegawa, Bejerot & Humble, 2007; Chu, 2007; Bejerot & Mörtberg, 2007; Harnum, Duffy, & Ferguson, 2007; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008a; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; Wainscot, Naylor, Sutcliffe, Tantum, & Williams, 2008).
Lack of Social Support as a Major Contributor to Bullying

Lack of sufficient social support against bullying may exacerbate risk of victimization of autistic people. Studies on bullying have found that strong close friendships and peer support creates a barrier to bullying (e.g. Hodges, Malone, & Perry, 1997; Boulton, Trueman, Chau, Whitehead, & Amatya, 1999; Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999; Schwartz, Dodge, Pettit, & The Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2000; Smith, Ananiadou, & Cowie, 2003; Holt & Espelage, 2007). Many autistic people have fewer close friendships and less developed peer support systems than their non-autistic peers have. This potentially increases their risk of bullying victimization (Bauminger & Kasari, 2000; Howlin, 2000; Carrington & Graham, 2001; Jones & Meldal, 2001; Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, Solomon, & Sirota, 2001; Baugminger, Shulman, & Agman, 2003; Carrington & Graham, 2003; Tsatsanis, 2003; Carter, Pritchard, Wittman, & Velde, 2004; Howlin, Goode, Hutton, & Rutter, 2004; Chamberlain, Kasari, & Rotheram-Fuller, 2007; Eaves & Ho, 2008; Wainscot, Naylor, Sutcliffe, Tantum, & Williams, 2008; Laugeson, Frankel, Mogil, & Dillon, 2009; Lasgaard, Nielson, Eriksen, & Goossens, 2010).

Educational Impact during the K-12 School Years

Bullying could subsequently become one of the greatest challenges faced by autistic people during their K-12 school years and throughout adult life. Jones, Ellins, Guldberg, Jordan, MacLeod, et al. (2007) from the University of Birmingham (in England) produced a report for the educational system in Northern Ireland that provides support for this assertion. The researchers applied semi-structured
interviews and surveys to examine needs and service usage of autistic adolescent students (aged 10-18) enrolled in primary and secondary schools in Northern Ireland. The number one school difficulty reported by student and parent participants was bullying.

The National Autistic Society (NAS), a British nonprofit organization, produced a report titled “B is for Bullied” (Reid & Batten, 2006) that yielded similar findings. The report’s research team surveyed the experiences of 1,400 families of autistic children in England. They also interviewed 28 adolescent and pre-adolescent autistic children. The survey found that more parent participants with children attending mainstream schools reported bullying (54 percent) than parent participants with children attending disability-specific schools (46 percent).

The survey also found gender differences in bullying experiences. Forty-two percent of parent participants with boys reported bullying, and thirty-five percent of parent participants with girls reported bullying. Bullying experiences affected their children’s lives at school and home. More than 40 percent of parent participants reported negative effects on the schoolwork of their children. Many parent participants (30 percent) reported that bullying had led their children to miss school, and nearly 4 percent of parent participants shared that their children had refused to go to school altogether. Almost 20 percent of parent participants reported that bullying had led them to transfer their children to another school.

Bullying affected children’s mental and social health, as well. More than 80 percent of parent participants reported that bullying had damaged the self-esteem
of their children, and more than 60 percent of parent participants reported that bullying had negatively affected the mental health of their children. More than 70 percent of parent participants reported that bullying had negatively affected the social skills and social relationships of their children.

Parent participants surveyed for the report described the negative affect that bullying had upon daily life for their children:

*She wouldn’t eat for a week. She also picks at her skin causing it to become infectious, and had to have antibiotics. She wanted to die, [and] head banged on [the] wall before being taken to school.*

*A lot of teasing and children copying the way she walks, etc. She is aware of it, and confidence is affected. She would self-mutilate, scratching herself, etc.*

*I am happier to have her at home, educating her whilst we wait for an appropriate school. At school she regressed—wasn’t given support adequately. She was sexually taken advantage of, bullied, blamed, and generally unhappy, and ultimately they were not protecting her. The local education authority was kept informed throughout, but did nothing; they did attend an annual review, but that was all.*

Many parent participants reported that bullies had physically attacked their children:

*He has always been bullied, and he has changed schools before because of this.*
He has come home with bruises and scratches all the time. I removed him from school today because I’m concerned what will happen to him.

We moved him at the end of year five because of bullying, which had resulted in physical injury. The bullying in secondary was classified by the staff as “regular teasing,” and was therefore ignored. When he reacted to it, first by school refusal, then by minor acts of violence, then by significant self-harm issues, he was classed as having emotional and behavioural difficulties, and excluded.

Carl doesn’t tell when he is being bullied. I have to figure it out, sometimes from bruises. His teachers don’t seem to notice—perhaps because of inadequate playtime supervision.

She is extremely distressed about going to school following episodes of extreme bullying—constantly crying all day at school and being sent home. I’ve got her at home today, and she’s still crying and in a distressed state.

Other parent participants described how bullying had negatively affected their children’s mental or physical health:

Our son was a quivering, nervous wreck by the time his first school finished with him. We were forced to pull him out as we had grave concerns about his mental health.

My child developed severe depression, and the school was unable to manage bullying. Lack of appropriate support meant my employment was badly
disrupted.

My daughter changed from being trusting, happy, un-self-aware to being paranoid, depressed, and suicidal. She wanted to change gender to being a boy, as she felt she could survive better if she was “tough.”

The school denied all. He became suicidal at seven years old. And his anxiety levels were so high [that] he became very hypersensitive and cannot wear normal clothing. Bullying was one of the causes of his anxiety.

My son was bullied to the point of wanting to end his life, and has self-harmed. He attends therapy to help him deal with this. We feel he will never recover from these feelings.

Some parent participants asserted that traumatic experiences with bullying had led their children to attempt suicide as an escape:

He made a serious suicide attempt. [He] climbed over the safety barrier of a bridge, and was found wanting to jump onto a busy dual carriageway.

Secondary school (mainstream) destroyed him and nearly caused him to commit suicide. Bullying was by staff, as well as by students. Five years on it caused Simon huge courage even to try at a mainstream college.

He has tried strangling himself because he is being bullied so much at school.
Most of the bullying is because he takes everything so literally. The teachers are not helping the situation, and feel that as he is not being bullied all the time
there is not really a problem.

The bullying was so bad that at 13 she tried to commit suicide. She has been mentally ill/paranoid/depressed/phobic ever since.

Youth participants interviewed for the report shared their own memories of bullying at school. Some of these youth participants described physical attacks by peers at school:

Donald (13):

At the beginning, they were quite nice. Once I started settling in it turned out to be a terror school...Well, there were several times they hurt me and were unfair. I had an OCD [Obsessive Compulsive Disorder] incident, and they were violent to me and pushed me around. I was scared about the work that had been put on the table, and I got scared.

Hugh (14):

It’s the same group of people [that] just annoy me all the time. They do a range of different stuff—chucking stuff at me, paper and stuff in class (not usually in break time). [They were] happy slapping me once—that got seriously dealt with. They got detention and badly shouted at.
Jamie (11):

I once took my little cat out to play, and they took it off me and threw it to each other. And then they threw him in the mud, and then they were making me chase them. But then they got big told off, so big that they got put into another room all by themselves, and the head teacher came down, and I heard them shouting really loud. They have never done it since.

Other youth participants recalled experiences with cognitive, emotional, and social bullying:

Alexander (11):

In the past everyone used to bully me, especially year 6’s when I was in years 4 and 3. [They] called me names—worst thing, in my class one or two people who were hitting me. I felt really annoyed. No one helped...One person in particular calls me a very large amount of names. Let’s just say that I learnt some of my rudest swear words from what that person used to, or still, calls me.

Ann (14):

I was bullied in my old school. It was hard. I was left out. They would not play with me. They chatted with each other but not to me. That made me feel sad because I wanted to be friends with them.

Ben (11):

People see that people with autism are different, and just because they are
different, they start teasing them….There was one or two people but they have stopped now. They were teasing, physical contact sometimes. They were just teasing me, trying to get me into trouble. I tend to know what bullies try to do. They attack and tease you, and try to make you to lash out and then go and tell the teacher, and try and get me in trouble. My main tactic is just to run. I’m a very fast runner when I feel like it. They mainly pick on me in the playground, and I’d run round the quiet area.

Jamie (11):

They laugh at me sometimes; I don’t know why, and they tease me. I hide under the desk because there are lots of boxes and that is a good place to hide. I talk to a teacher; I talk to Mrs. Waddington (the SENCO). She is not my form teacher, but I always talk to her because she is nice

A report on school life for autistic students produced by Autism South Australia (ASA, 2005) provides further insight into bullying challenges. The report surveyed parents of 363 adolescent and pre-adolescent autistic children (aged 6-15) about their satisfaction with their children's schools. A majority of participants (70 percent) reported that their children had experienced bullying at school. Although most instances of bullying reported by participants (56 percent) involved physical attacks, other forms of bullying occurred often, as well. Many participants (30 percent) reported verbal bullying of their children, and some participants (13 percent) reported emotional bullying of their children. Most participants indicated that this victimization of their children happened regularly. About a third of
participants (36 percent) reported that bullying occurred on a daily basis, and some participants (20 percent) reported that it occurred on a weekly basis. A few participants (3 percent) reported that it occurred on a monthly basis. The rest of participants (41 percent) reported that bullying only occurred sporadically. Participants surveyed described how bullying had negatively affected their children’s daily living:

She regresses terribly when bullied. The school is unable to understand the dramatic effects of this—for example: nightmares, regression of speech, and bedwetting.

Monitored eating times were too hard to free up a teacher, so she was bullied and food stolen.

He has been bullied on a daily basis, and it varies from subtle to severe. It is a bit better now—less physical. The school has made excuses like: “They are teenagers,” “They are a difficult group,” [and] “X provokes them”. Things that have happened on a daily basis include: name calling, putting his bag in the bin or hiding it, laughing at him, screaming when he touched them, [and] not wanting him in a group. He says, “They are repulsed by me. I know because they show it all the time. They think that I am the lowest form of life.” [It’s] now seen by him as “a fact of life...They can’t help it.”

Several participants reported that bullying had led them to change their children’s schools:
[We are] now suffering bullying again ([We] had changed schools in yr. 5 due to excessive bullying, and the issue ignored.) [It] seems to be human nature as heart breaking as it is for parents.

[We] had to change [the] school because of bullying.

Other participants expressed concern that school officials did not heed their concerns when they reported bullying:

[We were] not believed when he reports bullying; [We are] told he is making it up.

Despite all our expressed concerns, bullying is dealt with at [a] class level, and this is ineffective.

Bullying’s Negative Impact on Long-term Quality of Life of Autistic People

Beardon & Edmonds (2007) produced a report that provides support for the belief that bullying affects the long-term quality of life of autistic people. Their report for the ASPECT Consultancy team (Asperger Syndrome People Each Contributing for Themselves) surveyed 230 autistic adults living in the United Kingdom about a wide range of issues related to their present quality of life. Although the report did not query participants’ age, participants did provide information about diagnostic history. The average age at which participants received an autism diagnosis was 29. Twenty-eight percent of participants had a co-occurring diagnosis. Among many other challenges reported, participants recalled memories of traumatic bullying
experiences from their childhoods. Two participants described how childhood bullying had negatively affected their social comfort and daily living:

   I would say my problems now in socialising are minimal at my age now (24), then [sic] when I was a teenager and first diagnosed when I had real problems at school with bullying.

[I] Loved isolation from people after a lifetime of torment and bullying in (mainstream) school.

Other participants recalled painful memories of physical attacks and verbal bullying:

   Due to not being diagnosed until 29 years of age, I feel as though I've been seriously let down. I had a very bad time at high school with extensive verbal bullying.

   I was bullied at school by some children for a few years until the police were brought in to stop the bullying. Even so, it was me that needed to change the class I was in and not the bully.

Two participants described how childhood bullying had negatively impacted their long-term mental health:

   I left school due to bullying and depression, becoming an outpatient in the child MH service.

   I have been teased and bullied throughout school, higher education, and by nasty care professionals. It hurt me badly. I thought about taking my own life.
There is too much bullying for people with AS (Asperger's Syndrome) conditions.

Many participants recommended that schools and communities work harder to lessen bullying in K-12 schools:

Lessen bullying in school. Lessen depression in adolescence. Lessen depression/suicide in young adulthood.

If peers are taught in school what it is like to live in the world of someone with ASD (autism spectrum disorder), then maybe they would not be so inclined to bully that person just because they are different yet look the same.

Bullying of AS (Asperger's Syndrome) children at school should be tackled.

Relationship between Peer Shunning and Bullying

Academic studies have also investigated the relationship between peer shunning of autistic youth and bullying. For one of these studies, Little (2002) surveyed parents (aged 23-58) of 411 children (aged 7-17) diagnosed on the autism spectrum, or with nonverbal learning disabilities. Most children of participants (82 percent) were male, and mean age of children of participants was 10.48. Most children of participants (75 percent) had a diagnosis on the autism spectrum without a diagnosis of a nonverbal learning disability. Many children of participants (15 percent) had a diagnosis of nonverbal learning disability without a diagnosis on the autism spectrum. Some children of participants (9 percent) had both a diagnosis on
the autism spectrum and identification of nonverbal learning disability. The researchers applied a scale from the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire to measure reported victimization of the children of participants.

Nearly all participants (94 percent) reported that their children had frequently experienced victimization by peers or siblings. Most participants (73 percent) reported that their children had been hit in the past year. (This rate is eight times higher than a comparison rate reported by a national Internet sample of 1,501 youth surveyed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCME) in 2000 (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Walak, 2000). Most participants (75 percent) reported that their children had experienced emotional bullying within the past year. Many participants reported that gangs had attacked their children (10 percent), or that their children had experienced a non-sexual assault to their genitals (15 percent). (The rate found by Little (2002) for gang attack was five times higher than the rate for gang attack found by the NCME comparison study).

Critically, this study by Little (2002) investigated the correlation between peer shunning of their participants and these bullying experiences. They examined peer shunning through three independent measures:

• invited to a birthday party in the last year

• picked last for sports teams at school

• eats alone at lunchtime
Many participants reported that their children had not received an invitation to a birthday party in the past year (33 percent), were among the last students to be picked for sports teams at school (31 percent), or ate alone during school lunchtime (11 percent). Participants who reported that their children experienced shunning through one or more of these three means also reported more frequent victimization by peers or siblings than parents who did not report shunning.

For another study, Carter (2009) surveyed parents of 34 youth identified on the autism spectrum (aged 5-21) who lived on Long Island, NY. Most of these children of participants (88 percent) were male. Sixty-eight percent of participants’ children had individualized education plans (IEPs), nine percent of participants’ children received accommodations under a 504 Plan, and 24 percent of participants’ children received no specialized educational services or accommodations. Most participants (nearly 65 percent) reported that their children had experienced bullying or victimization in the past year. Many participants (47 percent) reported that peers or siblings had their children, and half of participants reported that their children had experienced emotional bullying. Some participants reported that gangs had attacked their children (9%), and many participants reported that their children had experienced a non-sexual assault to their genitals (9%).

Carter (2009) found prevalence rates for bullying of autistic youth and for subtypes of bullying (e.g. physical attack, emotional attack, gang attack, non-sexual attack to the genitals) lower than prevalence rates reported by Little (2002). Several factors may account for this discrepancy:
• Carter (2009) surveyed a smaller sample of participants than Little (2002): 34 parents compared to 411 parents.

• The ages of children of participants from Carter (2009) spanned a wider range than the ages of children of participants from Little (2002): ages 5-21 compared to ages 7-17.

• The disability identifications of children of participants in samples from the two studies differed. Carter (2009) adopted a homogenous sample; they only surveyed parents of children identified on the autism spectrum. Little (2002) adopted a heterogeneous sample; they surveyed parents of children identified on the autism spectrum, or with a nonverbal learning disability.

Carter (2009) also generated qualitative data from participants about their children’s bullying experiences. Several participants asserted that victimization had led their children to develop suicide ideation or make a suicide attempt. One child wanted to be run over by a car. Another child attempted suicide after an assault by middle school peers.

*Bullying Attacks in Mainstream and Inclusive Settings*

Other studies of bullying of autistic youth have specifically examined experiences in mainstream and inclusive settings. For one of these studies, Humphrey & Lewis (2008b) conducted a qualitative investigation of the views and experiences of 20 autistic adolescent students (aged 11-17) enrolled in four mainstream secondary schools in northwestern England. The research team studied participants’ school
history through several complementary methods. They conducted semi-structured interviews with participants and analyzed daily diaries maintained by participants for a month. Humphrey & Lewis (2008b) also examined drawings lent to them by one participant. They then applied an interpretive phenomenological analysis to the three sources of data to explore how participants made sense of their daily educational experiences. Participants recalled vivid memories of emotional and physical harassment from peers:

They just say, “Oh, hello, Harry Potter!” often like that; it gets on my nerves. But I just ignore them and walk on... People in my class know about my autism at school. That’s why they like to pick on me.... They call me names like weirdo and stuff.

[Male Pupil 1] was a person who was always hit someone, and also [Male Pupil 2] is very nasty and keeps punching me... Yeah, he punched me a lot... whenever he sees me.

An analysis of diary entries written by participants provided an additional window into their experiences as victims of bullying. One series of entries described how a bully had attacked a participant physically over a two-week period, including tackling him, and pinning him against a door. Another series of entries described how bullies had taunted a participant daily over a 10-day period for an incident in which his peers had tricked him; a female student had deceived this participant into believing she was his new girlfriend.
The participant who created the drawings provided a visual glimpse into his experiences with victimization by peers. This participant drew two illustrations that depicted groups of peers overwhelmingly harassing him and the resulting consequence:

- 1) A drawing of his peers overcrowding him

- 2) A drawing of a future in which he had died from a bomb aboard an airplane—likely a metaphorical representation of how peer harassment made him feel. This drawing also showed groups of his peers partying over his death

Two qualitative studies conducted by Carrington & Graham (2001) and Carrington & Graham (2003) provide further support for the bullying challenges experienced by autistic youth in mainstream and inclusive settings. Carrington & Graham (2003) conducted semi-structured interviews with five autistic adolescent students (aged 14-17) enrolled in a large urban secondary school in Queensland, Australia. Mean age of participants was 15.8, and most participants (80 percent) were male.

One study participant (Larry) described how intense arguments with peers had “forced him into [the] hospital from something physical.” Larry recalled experiences when peers had destroyed his property, including his computer. Another participant (John) remembered interactions with his peers in which “they tease you about yourself just because they are a little bit different.”

For another study, Carrington & Graham (2001) conducted semi-structured
interviews with two autistic adolescent students (aged 13) enrolled at private secondary schools in Queensland, Australia. The research team also interviewed the adolescents’ mothers. While discussing social interaction on the playground, one adolescent participant remarked that:

*I get stressed in the playground....Because when other kids listen to you, they tease you. Sometimes I wish I don’t have [sic] fixations.*

For another study on school bullying of autistic adolescents, Connor (2000) investigated day-to-day experiences of students in Surrey, England. They interviewed 16 autistic adolescent students from four grade levels (7, 8, 9, and 11) enrolled at nine secondary schools. Most participants (94 percent) were male. While discussing peers with whom they did not get along, many participants recalled traumatic experiences of bullying. Several participants reported physical attacks:

*Two girls—One hits me when I don’t say hello, the other hits me every time I say hello.*

*He finds it fun to beat up Year 7’s.*

*He used to take my things.*

Other participants recalled negative experiences with cognitive, emotional, and social bullying:

*Some boys pick on me; one boy finds it fun to tease me.*

*They distract me and are rude to the teacher.*
One boy always talks about me; he’s always whispering.

Other people pick on me, and try to get me to fight others. There was a fight going on, and I went over and told this boy to stop.

If people are nasty, I just ignore it.

An honors thesis study conducted by Cole (1997) provides additional insight into school bullying of autistic youth. This study surveyed parents of 430 adolescent and pre-adolescent children (aged 8-16) enrolled in 16 primary and secondary schools in South Australia. A majority of participants (83 percent) reported that bullies had victimized their children. Participants whose children experienced greater challenges with communication, social interaction, and other activities of daily living reported more frequent bullying.

Other studies found a similar association between victimization of autistic students and their communication and social skills. For instance, Sterzing, Shattuck, Narendorf, Wagner, & Cooper (2012) conducted a secondary analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Transition Survey. Among the 1,100 autistic students included in the survey, 46.3 percent experienced bullying. The highest rates of bullying victimization correlated with moderate challenges in communication and social skills. Likewise, a study by Rowley, Chandler, Baird, Simonoff, Pickles, Loucas, et al. (2012) yielded similar findings from self-reports by children, parents, and teachers for a sample of 100 autistic adolescents. Their surveys found that individuals with some challenges in communication and socialization—but not the
most challenges—experienced the highest frequency of bullying. Both Sterzing, Shattuck, Narendorf, Wagner, & Cooper (2012) and Rowley, et al. (2012) also found that students in more inclusive school placements experienced higher rates of bullying.

Recognizing the impact of school placement on bullying, the possibility exists that disability-specific placements have lower rates for bullying victimization of autistic youth than mainstream settings. One study in the academic literature investigated bullying of autistic students in disability-specific schools. Van Roekel, Scholte, & Didden (2010) studied victimization among 230 autistic adolescents (aged 12-19) enrolled in three special education schools in eastern Holland. (Most students attending these schools are on the autism spectrum.) Mean age of these students was 15.97, and most of these students (90 percent) were male. Some of these students (13 percent) had a co-occurring diagnosis of ADHD. A comparative group for the study consisted of 20 non-autistic adolescent students. The research team used classroom surveys to examine the experiences of the autistic adolescent students and their peers in the comparative group. They also surveyed the students’ teachers.

Student participants rated each of their peers and themselves using five-point Likert scales of bullying and victimization. They also evaluated bullying situations presented in two videos. Teachers of student participants rated their students’ involvement in victimization or bullying, and evaluated the videos. Prevalence rates of victimization reported by the teacher and student samples
differed markedly as teachers reported a higher frequency of bullying. Seventeen percent of students reported that they faced monthly bullying at least monthly, and ten percent of students reported that they experienced weekly bullying. In contrast, students reported significantly lower rates of bullying for their classmates. They indicated that seven percent of their classmates experienced monthly bullying and four percent experienced weekly bullying. Their teachers reported that 30 percent of the students experienced monthly bullying and 18 percent of their students faced weekly bullying.

Two factors may account for these discrepancies:

• It is possible that student self-reports may under-estimate and under-report instances of bullying and harassment due to an insufficient understanding of the problem or victimization trauma.

• Studies in the academic literature indicate that autistic people can have trouble with articulating their feelings, emotions, and autobiographical experiences (Bruck, London, Landa, & Goodman, 2007; Crane & Goddard, 2008). Experiences with victimization may exacerbate this difficulty.

Another important finding from Van Roekel, Scholte, & Didden (2010) concerns a lower rate of victimization than rates reported by other studies. Sample demographics adopted by Van Roekel, Scholte, & Didden (2010) may account for this. Student participants of the study attended a disability-specific school where bullying may have a lower prevalent than in a mainstream or inclusive setting.
Relationship between Bullying of Autistic Youth and Mental Health

A few studies in the literature investigated associations between victimization of autistic people and mental health-related challenges and disabilities (anxiety, depression, and suicide). For one study, Shtayermann (2007) surveyed 10 autistic youth (mean age of 19.7 years) and their parents. Ninety percent of participants were male. The research team applied rating scales from the Social Experience Questionnaire to measure victimization. Nearly 40 percent of youth participants reported a level of victimization that met threshold criteria of Shtayermann (2007) for high frequency. Twenty percent of youth participants met clinical criteria for major depression, thirty percent met clinical criteria for generalized anxiety, and fifty percent possessed a clinically significant level of suicide ideation. A small, non-representative sample may account for a high rate of suicide ideation in this study.

However, other studies found high rates for suicidal ideation and suicide attempts among autistic people. Mikami, Inomata, Hayakawa, Ohnishi, Enseki, et al. (2009) conducted one of these studies in Japan. Their study examined the experiences of a population of 94 adolescents (aged younger than 20) hospitalized for inpatient treatment after attempting suicide. Nearly 13 percent of participants met clinical criteria for a diagnosis on the autism spectrum.

Parallels between K-12 Bullying of Autistic Youth and Youth with Disabilities Broadly

Findings from these studies and reports collectively provide support for the assertion that bullying presents a significant challenge for autistic students during
their K-12 educational years. This situation parallels a broader trend in the cross-disability academic literature that indicates that people with disabilities may be at a greater risk for bullying victimization than people without disabilities. People with disabilities subjected to bullying victimization over an extended duration experience greater incidences of mental and physical health-related challenges and disabilities during childhood, adolescence, and adult life than do people without disabilities. These mental and physical health-related challenges and disabilities include somatic and psychosomatic physical ailments, lowered self-esteem, depression, loneliness, impaired concentration, isolation and avoidance of others, insecurity, anxiety, decreased academic performance, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts. People with disabilities that seem hidden or invisible often have the greatest risk for victimization and its ensuing consequences. Others might not understand their atypical actions and thoughts as associated with a disability (Thompson, Whitney, & Smith, 1994; Marini, Fairbairn, & Zuber, 2001; Mishna, 2003; Nabuzoka, 2003; Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Carlson, Flannery, & Krai, 2005; Carter & Spencer, 2006; Baumeister, Storch, & Geffken, 2008; Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2009; Weiner & Mak, 2009).

*Bullying Victims Turning to Bullying*

Experiences with bullying victimization may also produce another negative consequence for victims: becoming bullies themselves. Professional and academic discourse characterizes this phenomenon of bullying victimization leading to additional bullying as bullying ladders, chains, and webs. Researchers and
professionals identify victimized people who engage in bullying as bully/victims (aka bully-victims), aggressive victims, and provocative victims (Schwartz, 2000; Haynie, Nansel, Eitel, Crump, Saylor, et al., 2001; Unnever, 2005; Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2008; Dukes, Stein, & Zane, 2009).

Victimized children who bully others differ from those who do not bully others. They have more frequently received neurological, developmental, and psychiatric diagnoses and accessed mental health services (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, et al., 2001; Juvonen, Graham, & Shuster, 2003; Van Cleave & Davis, 2006). In one study of bullying and its relationship to clinical diagnoses, Montes & Haltermann (2007) examined reported bullying among 53,219 children (aged 6 to 17) whose parents completed questionnaires for the National Survey of Children's Health (Blumberg, Olson, Frankel, Osborn, & Srinath, 2003) conducted by the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics. The research team found that children diagnosed both with ADHD and autism were five times more likely to engage in bullying than children without those two diagnoses. Children diagnosed with ADHD alone were twice as likely to bully others than children without ADHD. Children diagnosed with autism but without ADHD were as likely to bully others as non-autistic children without an ADHD diagnosis.

**Cyberbullying of Autistic Youth**

In one study, researchers investigated cyberbullying among students at a school for children with disabilities in a southern part of Holland. Didden, Scholte, Korzilius, Vermeulen, O'Reilly, et al. (2009) studied the experiences of students with
disabilities at the Herman Broen School. They surveyed 114 students (aged 12-19) diagnosed with intellectual disability, ADHD, or autism. The vast majority of participants (82 percent) carried a diagnosis of intellectual disability, or they scored in the borderline IQ range. Most participants (67 percent) carried an identification of ADHD, autism, or both. Additionally, most participants (75 percent) were male. The study participants filled out a questionnaire with questions about their experiences with bullying through the Internet and cell-phones. This questionnaire also asked them open-ended and closed questions about their socio-demographics, self-esteem, and experiences with depression.

In line with other research, this study found that participants experienced cyberbullying at high rates. Twenty-two percent of participants reported that they faced cyberbullying on a monthly basis. Nine percent of participants indicated that they faced cyberbullying on a weekly basis. Participants who regularly connected to the Internet and used cell-phones reported higher rates of cyberbullying than those who did not. Participants who used the Internet for more than one hour per day faced the highest rate of cyberbullying. This study also identified significant associations between cyberbullying and participants’ mental health. Participants who experienced more frequent cyberbullying reported lower levels of self-esteem and expressed more depressive feelings.

Considering these results, this study's sample demographic may represent a significant limitation for its findings. Specifically, participants' attendance at a disability-specific school may mean that they face a different cyberbullying rate than
students at general schools. Prior research on bullying of students with disabilities indicates that they can experience higher rates of bullying in mainstream and inclusive settings than at disability-specific classrooms and schools.

A more recent study of cyberbullying by Kowalski & Fedina (2011) specifically investigated its relation to challenges in health and wellbeing. They surveyed 42 individuals who had received a diagnosis of autism or ADHD. Bullied youth reported lower levels of physical and psychological health.

**Overview of the Literature on Bullying of Autistic Youth**

The literature on bullying of autistic youth provides an important foundation of knowledge to inform conducting this dissertation study. Existing studies highlight the tremendous negative association between bullying and negative health and well-being of autistic youth. At the same time, the literature also contains several major gaps that provide the motivation to conduct this study. Whereas a few studies examined factors that affect how students generally report bullying, no studies did so in the context of autism. Likewise, no studies investigated how parental monitoring might affect bullying of autistic youth. Additionally, only a couple of studies in the existing literature on bullying of autistic youth explored it in the context of cyberbullying. This study extends this body of work by investigating instances of both cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth.
Chapter 3: Methodology
Methodology

Overview

This study investigated face-to-face and cyberbullying among autistic youth (aged 13-18). The research inquiry aimed to learn more about how bullying affects the perspectives and experiences of these autistic youth. Additionally, the researcher wanted to learn about how autistic youth address bullying and report it to parents, teachers, and other authorities. This pursuit reflected a goal to contribute to the research base on bullying and fill in existing gaps.

To accomplish this task the researcher adopted a mixed methodology research design. This chapter outlines this research design, its eligibility criteria, the process to select the participant sample, and participants' backgrounds. The narrative in this chapter also discusses protection of human participants, study rigor, and data analysis procedures.

Research Design

The study focus area of cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth represents an emerging topic in the research literature. Large gaps remain about how cyber- and face-to-face bullying affects the wellbeing and quality of life of autistic youth. Researchers have not yet generated factors specific to how bullying affects autistic youth. Additionally, little understanding exists for how autistic youth address cyber- and face-to-face bullying and report it to authorities. The atypical life experience of autistic people suggests that they might approach how to handle bullying and self-report it differently than their peers. Particularly, the challenges they experience
with communication and socialization might considerably affect how they address and report instances of bullying.

Primary Method: Semi-Structured Interviews

These gaps in researchers’ knowledge of cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth suggested a qualitative method as the primary method for a research inquiry. For this study, the researcher adopted semi-structured interviews with autistic youth (aged 13-18) as the qualitative method. The choice of this method reflected an explicit decision by the researcher. The researcher’s experiences working with autistic youth and familiarity with the autism literature suggested that interviews would fit this study’s aim. Particularly, interviews would enable autistic youth to share in-depth details about their experiences with bullying at their own pace. They could take the time to think about and describe facts and key facets of their memories of bullying victimization across diverse contexts. This nature of the interview as a method of inquiry particularly matched the affinity for facts and details shared by many autistic people.

Secondary Method: Surveys with Autistic Youth

For the secondary method, the researcher adopted a survey with the autistic youth who participated in the interviews. Participants completed a two-page survey about their cyber- and face-to-face bullying experiences. This survey represented a matrix that outlined common types of cyber- and face-to-face bullying, frequency of occurrence, and severity. For the purposes of this study, the severity indicator
reflected participants’ perceptions of how different types of bullying negatively affected them.

Completing this survey, participants checked off severity and frequency for each type of cyber- and face-to-face bullying they experienced. They also checked off how often they reported bullying to others for each type of bullying listed. Collection of this survey information served two purposes. First, the survey with autistic youth helped situate interviews with them. The survey answers provided by participants helped the researcher to focus the interviews on specific instances of bullying. Second, this survey information facilitated the researcher’s development of cohesive themes about participants’ bullying experiences during qualitative analysis of interview data. The survey data additionally assisted triangulation and ensured greater confidence in data analysis.

Tertiary Method: Surveys with Parents of the Autistic Youth

For the tertiary method, the researcher asked one of the parents of the participants to complete a nine-page survey about their child’s bullying experiences. The first section of this survey asked questions of the parents that participants could not likely answer themselves. The parents completed information about when their children received a clinical diagnosis of autism. They also filled out information about the medical and neurological diagnoses their children had received. Additionally, parents answered questions about demographics, their children’s educational placement, and their child’s comfort with communication and socialization. The demographic questions asked parents about their children’s
gender, race/ethnicity, and grade level. Educational background questions asked parents about their children’s educational placement, performance in school (grades), and favorite school subjects. Questions about communication and socialization inquired about conversation skills, social skills, and friendships.

This survey completed by the parents of participants also asked them to fill out information about their children’s use of technology and bullying experiences. The former questions inquired about devices their children use and frequency of usage. Other questions asked parents about types of bullying their children experienced, the strategies they used to address bullying, and their history with reporting it. To ask parents about their children’s technology use informed the context for experiences with cyberbullying. Questions about bullying experiences, strategies, and reporting history helped to expand upon information developed during the interviews. To ask this information from parents also provided one way to triangulate qualitative findings from the interviews. Qualitative open-ended comments made by parents on the survey particularly served this purpose.

**Research Approach, Epistemology, and Ontology**

Developing the research approach for this study, the researcher first situated the epistemological and ontological stances. Myers (1997) describes three different epistemological frameworks for researchers’ inquiry: positivist, interpretive, and critical theory. A positivist epistemology views the external world as an objective reality containing elements connected by causally defined relationships (known as universal laws). Therein, the positivist researcher seeks an objective means to
describe and analyze these relationships and their connection to fundamental facts about the external world. In contrast, an interpretive epistemology sees the external world as a subjective reality characterized by unique intent and meaning. An interpretive researcher, thus, adopts a subjective approach to develop new knowledge and understanding of this intent and meaning. The interpretive approach uses a systems perspective that views all elements of the world as intrinsically interconnected. Finally, the critical theory orientation sees the world as a subjective reality characterized by unique intent and meaning shaped by people’s actions. The critical theory epistemology presumes that people and organizations share beliefs and actions that direct human behavior and generate dysfunction when in conflict. Thus, a critical theory researcher aims to better understand these conflicts and the actions and belief systems that drive them.

This study’s researcher adopted an interpretive epistemology and approach for the research lens. This research lens sought to gain insight into a major social phenomenon (cyber- and face-to-face bullying) through an inquiry at the individual level of analysis. Interpretation of the perspectives and experiences of each autistic youth participating in the study facilitated qualitative analysis at the individual level. This study therein sought to generate new knowledge about factors underlying cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth.

The choice of this interpretive lens reflected a need to understand the unique human perspective and sense making of autistic youth. This selection also matched the research orientation of the researcher. The researcher extensively experienced bullying during his years in K-12 education. These experiences served to inform the
interpretation of the study participants’ experiences and perspectives on cyber- and face-to-face bullying.

Additionally, the interpretive lens fit the researcher’s ontological position of constructivism. The constructivist ontological position carries three important tenants: First, individuals possess unique, personalized understandings of the social-cultural world that vary widely among different groups in society. Second, individuals actively construct their social understandings through their engagement in meaningful experiences. Third, this active process to construct new understandings intrinsically depends on extensive experiences with social interaction.

Participants

Number of Participants

Thirteen autistic youth between the ages of 13 and 18 participated in this study’s interviews. This sample size reflected a number sufficiently large enough to achieve saturation to address the study’s research questions.

Participant Recruitment

The researcher used a combination of two sampling strategies to locate a convenience sample of youth and parents for this dissertation study. These two sampling strategies relied on contacting parents of autistic youth to recruit them and their children into the study:
a) The researcher primarily made use of email listservs for families of autistic youth as a point of contact for recruitment. These listservs represent a common forum for families to seek mutual support and guidance to address challenges like bullying and school related difficulties. This characteristic of the listservs made them a natural place to find parents of bullied autistic youth. The researcher sent a recruitment email message (See Appendix C) to two listservs used by families of autistic youth. These listservs’ members reside in the Central Pennsylvania and the Washington D.C. metropolitan areas.

Parents who responded to the recruitment message received follow-up communications from the researcher by email or phone. (The type of follow-up communication depended on what the parents had shared for how to contact them.) This follow-up communication answered any questions parents had about the study and clarified the study’s details. The researcher also sought to ascertain that the children of parents met the eligibility criteria for the study. After verifying this with parents, the researcher scheduled the interview sessions and discussed logistics for how to reach the interview location.

b) The researcher secondarily made use of colleagues’ social connections to recruit participants for the study. This strategy helped recruit participants in Mississippi who did not belong to an email listserv for families of autistic youth. A colleague who operates a statewide organization for autism in Mississippi connected him with four families of autistic youth.
Sample Inclusion Criteria

Developing this study, the researcher generated four critical inclusion criteria for study participants. All autistic youth who participated in this research study had to meet these four inclusion criteria:

1. Clinical Diagnosis of Autism

All participants must have received a diagnosis on the autism spectrum from a psychologist, psychiatrist, or other clinician. The American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (DSM) contains the standard diagnostic criteria for autism used in the U.S. The DSM’s Fourth Edition (APA, 1994) outlines three common diagnoses for autism: autistic disorder, Asperger’s Syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS). All participants must have received one of these clinical diagnoses of autism from DSM-IV. Alternatively, participants must have received a clinical diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) from the newly published fifth edition of the DSM (APA, 2013).

2. Participants’ Age

The age for all participants had to fall into the range (inclusive) that spanned 13 and 18 years old at time of participation in the study. The selection of this age range for participants reflected an explicit decision by the researcher. Specifically, this age range made it more likely that participants had experienced cyber- and face-to-face bullying in recent years. For participants in middle school, this meant that they
would likely have experienced bullying in elementary school or middle school. For participants in high school or recent high school graduates, this meant they would likely have experienced bullying in elementary, middle, or high school.

Additionally, this age range increased the likelihood that participants possessed the maturity and ability to articulate fluently their experiences with bullying. The researcher’s understanding of childhood development and familiarity with its literature indicated that a younger age minimum might introduce problems. Pre-teenaged autistic children might likely lack the communication and socialization abilities and cognitive development needed to participate in the interview.

3. Participants’ Fluency in the English Language

All participants needed to converse freely in fluid English understandable by the researcher. Thus, the study explicitly excluded from participation autistic youth from cultural and linguistic minority groups with limited English proficiency. This requirement reflected the need for participations to share extensive details about their experiences with cyber- and face-to-face bullying during the interviews. Conversing with participants, the researcher only had proficiency in English. Thus, to communicate with participants in Spanish or another foreign language would not have feasibility.

The study required participants to converse during the interview through either spoken English or verbal forms of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). These verbal forms of AAC include letter boards, sign language, written/typed notes, and speech-generating typing devices. Many autistic youth
prefer or need to communicate by these and other forms of AAC all the time or some of the time. Thus, this study recognized that participants might use verbal-centric forms of AAC rather than speech to communicate during the interviews.

4. Participants’ Communication and Socialization Ability

The nature of this study's use of qualitative interviews placed significant constraints on participants’ communication and socialization abilities. All autistic youth participating in this study needed to meet a certain threshold for communication and socialization. Specifically, they needed to have the ability to freely converse with the researcher during a 30-minute to hour-long interview.

During this interview, participants largely had to maintain a focus on their experiences with cyber- and face-to-face bullying. Although the researcher allowed participants to bring up related subjects, the conversation's discussion had to center mostly on bullying. Therein, participants had to have the ability to recall and share details about their memories of bullying victimization.

Sample Exclusion Criteria

This study excluded any participants who did not fully meet these inclusion criteria. The researcher excluded youth without a clinical diagnosis of autism, as well as youth younger than 13 or older than 18. Other exclusionary criteria for youth included lack of fluency in English and lack of ability to converse during a 30 to 60 minute interview. Additionally, autistic youth who did not have a parent available to complete the parental survey could not participate in the study.
Protection of Human Participants

*Informed Consent and Assent*

Before each interview, the researcher asked a parent of the participant to read a consent form for the study. This consent form served two purposes. First, the consent form granted the parents’ permission for their children to participate in the interviews and complete the two-page surveys. Second, this consent form also granted permission for the parents to participate in this study themselves.

If parents consented for their children and them to participate in the research study, they signed and completed the consent form. After parents’ granted this consent, the researcher then asked the participants to read a child assent form. If they agreed to participate in the study, they signed and completed this assent form. In the case of participants aged 18, their assent form also served as a consent form for their participation in the research. Having reached the age of majority, these individuals did not require permission from their parents to participate in a research study.

*IRB Review of the Study and Protection Procedures*

The researcher submitted an application to Penn State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) in November 2012 to conduct the study. After a review of the study’s protection of human participants, the IRB then granted permission to run the study. The IRB deemed the level of risk to human participants minimal. The main source of potential risk involved potential psychological harm that could result from participants’ recall of painful memories of bullying.
The researcher advised participants and their parents that their participation in the study represented a voluntary activity. They could halt their participation in the study at any time without any penalty. The researcher also educated participants about protection of anonymity and confidentiality for their participation in the study.

Seeking to minimize participants’ risk, the researcher pursued several activities. Participants in this research study received a pseudonym to protect their identities from the potential harm of public disclosure. All descriptions of participants in this dissertation and other materials resulting from the study use these pseudonyms to refer to participants. No descriptions in this dissertation or other materials resulting from this study refer to participants by their real first or last names. A coded list stored securely by the researcher assigned participants an ID number and a pseudonym.

Additionally, the researcher pursued several means to maintain protection of information generated by the study. The researcher stored paper data from the study in a secured office cabinet. Only the researcher had access to this cabinet. Likewise, the researcher secured electronic data generated by the study through strong encryption. This protection extended to digital audio files generated from the study’s interviews with autistic youth.

**Study Setting**

Communicating with participants’ parents by email and phone, the researcher arranged dates, times, and locations for the interviews with participants. Most of the
interviews took place in quiet, private rooms at the participants’ school or at the home of a colleague of the researcher. The interviews in the State College area took place at the researcher’s academic building on Penn State University’s campus. Some of the parents of completed the parental survey in advance of the interview, and some completed it at the same time as the interview.

**Data Collection Procedures for the Study**

*Surveys with Parents of the Participants*

Participants’ parents completed the nine-page survey. (A more detailed description of this survey appears above in the research design section.) The researcher provided participants’ parents with a print copy of the survey and a pen to complete it. In some cases, participants elected to use their own writing utensils (e.g., pens, pencils) to complete the surveys.

As needed, the researcher answered any questions that participants’ parents had about the survey questions. This process served to clear up any confusion or misunderstanding about the questions’ wording. The researcher also allowed participants’ parents as much time as they needed to complete the survey. Most participants completed the survey within 20 to 30 minutes.

*Surveys with Participants*

At the beginning of each interview with participants, the researcher asked them to fill out the two-page survey. (A more detailed description of this survey appears above in the research design section). The researcher provided participants with a
pen and a paper copy of survey. In some cases, participants elected to use their own writing utensil (pen or pencil) to complete the surveys. The researched allowed participants as much time as they needed to fill out the surveys. Additionally, the researcher clarified information on the survey as requested and answered participants’ questions to clear up any confusion. This process led a couple of participants to modify their answers to their survey.

*Interviews with Participants*

Following participants’ completion of the two-page survey, the interviewer began the semi-structured interview about participants’ experiences with cyber- and face-to-face bullying. The use of a pre-prepared interview script (see the Appendix section) helped both to structure and to situate the discussion during these interviews. The researcher recorded these interviews into AAC audio format with a digital recorder.

The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 45 minutes depending on information shared, participants’ fatigue, and other factors. During this interview period, the researcher permitted participants to take breaks and use the restroom as needed. The researcher also made sure that participants had sufficient time to think about and process questions. Assisting their participation, participants received a bottle of water as requested.

At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher then recorded detailed field notes. These field notes conveyed reflections on the descriptions, beliefs, and feelings participants shared during the course of the interview. The field notes also
examined meaning underlying these descriptions and relationships with the study’s four research questions.

**Data Analysis**

*Interview Transcription and Data Recording*

Following completion of the interviews with autistic youth, the study entered the transcription and recording phase of data analysis. An outside transcription service generated text transcripts for each interview’s audio recording. Additionally, the researcher recorded qualitative comments made by participants’ parents during their completion of the surveys they completed. Collectively, the text transcripts and qualitative comments supported the qualitative analysis of data.

The survey filled out by the parents of participants also yielded quantitative data. The researcher recorded this quantitative data into an Excel spreadsheet to facilitate quantitative data analysis. This process assisted the generation of aggregate descriptions of participants’ backgrounds.

*Data Coding and Theme Generation*

Before conducting the interviews and surveys, the researcher generated a priori codes to facilitate later data analysis. These a priori codes aligned directly with the study’s main research questions. Additionally, the codes reflected anticipated key concepts. For instance, RQ3 about the reporting of bullying led to a priori codes of *reported bullying, reported to parents, and reported to teachers.*
Following the phase of transcription and data recording, data analysis shifted into inductive coding of the interview data. The researcher adopted a process for qualitative coding and theme generation modeled after (La Pelle, 2004). La Pelle (2004) describes how to conduct qualitative data analysis with the assistance of general-purpose tools like Microsoft Word.

To generate qualitative codes to describe patterns in the data, the researcher performed a multi-step process. This process involve the following four steps:

1) Readings and Reflection: The researcher first immersed within the interview and survey data. This immersion involved several readings of both the interview transcripts and the qualitative comments from parental surveys. While reading these materials, the researcher engaged in a critical reflexive process about the meaning of the data and its relationship to the academic literature. The researcher also examined the study’s field notes and reflected on their relationship to the study data and the literature.

2) Textual Markup: Qualitative analysis for the study then entered the markup phase. Using a pen, the researcher marked up the interview transcripts and qualitative comments from the parental survey. This markup process involved underlying important passages of the text and making notes in the margins. These notes referred to thoughts about patterns in the data and some initial inductive codes. The physical activity of marking up the data on paper facilitated greater understanding by the researcher of the meaning of statements.
3) Data Analysis Tables: Following the markup phase, data analysis entered a more structured phase that involved the creation of data analysis tables in Word. The researcher created data analysis tables to assist with the generation of inductive codes. These data analysis tables contained four columns: a) participant name, b) passage text, c) associated research questions, and d) codes, and e) concepts and descriptors.

4) The creation of these data tables facilitated the development of themes to describe the data. Table 3-1 below shares the codes that resulted from each research question and the thematic patterns that emerged from these codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1. How do cyber- and face-to-face bullying affect the perceptions and experiences of autistic youth (aged 13-18)?</td>
<td>Feeling; Perception; Bad Memory; Frequency; Physical Bullying; Cognitive Bullying; Social/Emotional Bullying; Focused Interest; Anonymity; Physical Presence; Cyber-Bullying; F2F-Bullying</td>
<td>T1. Bullying Shapes Autistic Youths’ Experiences, Emotions, and Perceptions; T2. Face-Face Bullying Exerts Greater Control over Physical Activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ2. What strategies do autistic youth use to address cyber- and face-to-face bullying?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy; Bullying Inhibitor; Ignore/Avoid; Parental Monitoring; Parental Block; Ally Support; Teacher Taught; Parental Taught; Report Bullying; Cyber-Bullying; F2F-Bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T3. Ignoring/Avoiding Cyber- and F2F Bullying as a Defensive Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4. Parental Monitoring of Online Activities Deters Cyberbullying Threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T6. Assistance from Allies to Address F2F and Cyberbullying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ3: How do autistic youth report instances of cyber- and face-to-face bullying to parents, teachers, and other authorities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report of Bullying; Reported to Teachers; Reported to Parents; Reported to Other Authorities; Reporting Barrier; Reporting Facilitator; Bullies Lied; Authority Inaction; Cyber-Bullying; F2F-Bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T5. Social-Cultural Barriers Hinder Reporting Bullying to Authorities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rigor of the Study

Commonly, quantitative research studies adopt several metrics to weigh the rigor of their research procedures. These metrics typically consist of: a) internal validity, b) external validity, c) reliability, and d) objectivity. Shenton (2004) describes how each of these criteria to judge rigor of a study has a specific analog in qualitative research. Table 3-2 below presents these analogous metrics for qualitative research:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3-2: Quantitative vs. Qualitative Criteria for Study Rigor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for Judging Quantitative Research’s Rigor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectivity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Seeking to ensure qualitative rigor for this dissertation, the researcher sought to address each of these four criteria. The following descriptions examine how this study captured each of these metrics for qualitative research:

*Credibility of the study*

Credibility addresses how much a study’s findings match and present congruence with the reality of the human social world (Shenton, 2004). Seeking to improve credibility of this study, the researcher employed multiple methods to triangulate the findings.

Completion of surveys by both the participants and their parents corroborated information generated during the interviews. The parents reported qualitative comments that supported related comments shared by their children. Additionally, parents in some cases provided comments that expanded upon what their children had shared or filled in gaps. Furthermore, parents shared some incidences of bullying that their children did not convey during the interviews.

During the interview sessions, the researcher also adopted commonly used tactics to help ensure honesty in information exchange. As described in the data collection section, the researcher sought to facilitate rapport by sharing his personal experiences with bullying. He assured participants that questions had no right or wrong answers. The researcher also reassured participants about the confidentiality of their answers and their right to skip or come back to an answer.
Transferability of the study

Transferability refers to whether and how a given study's findings fit into outside contexts (Shenton, 2004). For this study, transferability concerns how the investigation of cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth fits into existing research and practice. Establishing transportability for the current study, the researcher compared the qualitative findings of this study with knowledge in the existing literature. This process compared the study findings with literature from the research community (e.g., journal articles) and the practitioner community (e.g., books, reports). The researcher also consulted stakeholders familiar with the domains of autism and bullying. This consultation shared the high-level themes developed from this study to help determine the cohesion and plausibility of the findings.

Dependability of the study

Dependability concerns how and whether other researchers can reasonably follow the trail of decisions made in a qualitative study (Shenton, 2004). Reading this document, researchers can identify a clearly marked path of inquiry. This path of inquiry runs from a review of the literature and relevant theory on to the identification of the specific problem to study and elaboration of its significance. The path then ends with an explicit set of steps for method selection, data collection, and data analysis. This mixed methods inquiry adopted both semi-structured interviews and surveys. Readers of this dissertation can follow the specific steps undertaken to conduct data collection for the interviews and surveys. They can also gain a clear
understanding of specific procedures adopted to analyze data from the interviews and the surveys.

Confirmability of the study

Confirmability refers to the degree to which others can confirm and corroborate a study’s results (Shenton, 2004). This study engaged in two primary activities to ensure confirmability of the study’s findings. First, the researcher sought to maintain a high level of transparency regarding the study’s procedures. To achieve this transparency the study explicitly described all details about activities for data collection and analysis. Second, the study conveyed background on the researcher’s approach to the subject matter of bullying of autistic youth. Descriptions about the researcher’s approach explicitly identified his relationship to the subject as a person who previously experienced bullying. Additionally, the researcher committed to extensive self-reflection throughout the course of this study. This self-reflection served to identify, examine, and carefully consider pre-suppositions about the topic. Self-reflection also informed an understanding of how the study’s findings align with the existing research literature and enhance it.

Summary

This dissertation study adopted mixed methodology to study cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth. These methods consisted of semi-structured interviews with autistic youth and surveys with the youth and their parents. The study digitally recorded and transcribed the interviews into text transcripts. Thereafter, extensive
analysis of this qualitative data resulted in the generation of themes to describe patterns identified in the data.
Chapter 4: Findings
Findings

Overview
This dissertation investigated cyber- and face-to-face bullying among autistic youth (aged 13-18). The study sought to learn how bullying can affect their perspectives and experiences. Additionally, the study aimed to gain a greater understanding of how autistic youth address bullying and report it to parents, teachers, and other authorities. This pursuit reflected a goal to contribute to the literature base on bullying and fill in existing gaps.

This fourth chapter presents the findings of this study of cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth. The narrative in this chapter first conveys information about the backgrounds of study participants. Next, the chapter presents themes that emerged from the data to describe how cyber- and face-to-face bullying affected participants. Finally, this chapter describes each of these themes and their connections with this study’s four research questions.

Interview Participant Sample: Aggregate Information

Age, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity
The age of the autistic youth who participated in the semi-structured interviews ranged from 13 to 18. The participants had a median age of 16 and a mean age of 15.85. Most (85 percent) of the participants were male. According to their parents, none of the participants spoke English as a second language. The participants had racial and ethnic backgrounds described in Table 4-1 below:
Table 4-1: Interview Participants’ Racial/Ethnicity Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial/Ethnicity Group</th>
<th>Percent of Interview Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Educational Profile

Participants’ educational placements ranged from partial inclusion (26-50 percent of classes in general education) to full inclusion (76-100 percent of classes in general education). Most (77%) of participants had an educational placement of full inclusion. The educational research literature educational indicates that an inclusive educational placement can put students at a higher risk for bullying. Table 4-2 below describes the overall picture of participants’ educational placements:

Table 4-2: Educational Placements of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Classes in General Education</th>
<th>Percent of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76 to 100 percent (Fully Included)</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 to 75 percent (Mostly Included)</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 50 percent (Partially Included)</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 to 24 percent (Not Included in General Education)</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The grade level of participants ranged from 7th grade (middle school) to 12th grade (upper high school). Participants had a median grade level of 9.69 and a mean grade level of 10 (lower high school). Their academic performance in school ranged from average (i.e., mostly B’s and C’s) to very above average (i.e., mostly A’s). Table 4-3 below describes the overall picture of how participants performed academically in their classes at school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Performance in School</th>
<th>Percent of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Above Average</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Average</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Average</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Communication and Socialization Abilities**

The vast majority (92%) of participants used speech as their singular mode of communication to interact in face-to-face settings. One participant made regular use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) to interact face-to-face. The parent of this participant reported that he used sign language and a speech-generating typing device to communicate in face-to-face settings. He also made use of some speech to communicate face-to-face.

The parents of participants reported that their children experienced varying degrees of comfort conversing and socializing with their peers. Parents reported that their children met with friends between 0 and 6 days per week. According to
the parents, participants met with friends outside school a median of .5 days per week and a mean of 1.2 days per week. Table 4-4 below summarizes how frequently participants met with friends outside school according to their parents.

**Table 4-4: Frequency in which participants met with friends**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gets together with friends for this many days per week</th>
<th>Percent of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 Days</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Day</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Days</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Days</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Days</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Days</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Days</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Days</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: One parent did not report how frequently her child met with friends.)

According to their parents, participants had a degree of comfort with conversation skills that ranged from some trouble with communication with peers to considerable trouble. Similarly, their comfort level with socialization skills also ranged from some trouble to considerable trouble. Tables 4-5 and 4-6 below describe how frequently participants fit into each category of communication and socialization skills:
**Table 4-5: Communication Skill Levels of Interview Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comfort with conversation skills when interacting with peers</th>
<th>Percent of interview participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does not usually converse with peers</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lots of trouble conversing with peers</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some trouble conversing with peers</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No trouble conversing with peers</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4-6: Socialization Skill Levels of Interview Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comfort with social skills when interacting with peers</th>
<th>Percent of interview participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does not usually socialize with peers</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lots of trouble socializing with peers</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some trouble socializing with peers</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No trouble socializing with peers</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview Participant Sample: Individual Backgrounds**

The participants in this research study had diverse backgrounds and perspectives that influenced their beliefs and perspectives regarding cyber- and face-to-face bullying. Table 4-7 below summarizes the backgrounds of each of the 13 participants of the study. Thereafter, the narratives that follow this table present a profile of each individual participant. These narratives outline their educational
history, their history of clinical and neurological diagnoses, and their comfort with socialization and communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Qualitative Capsule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Adam</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>“There were a lot of school-related bullying classes. As you know, teachers don’t want any bullying. They don’t want any bullying whatsoever in school... [Teachers taught me]: ‘Report to a teacher if you are harassed emotionally or physically. Don’t keep it in,’ they say. ‘Don’t fight back as well.’ That’s one of the bigger things. ‘Don’t fight back. Just sort of walk away from it if you can’...I remember that they taught us to think of a good memory...to think of a good memory and then rely on that to get you through [the bullying].”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bob</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>“[In reaction to] what I post on Facebook: One kid would call me stupid or an idiot because of maybe what I do, and maybe he doesn’t like that. [I got] a little upset.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Conner</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>“It was sixth grade. A rumor was spread about me. People thought I was gay or homosexual. It would go around and around from all sorts of people. People would not want to be my friend any more [or] be around me. They [would] call me the ‘gay kid’”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. David</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>“He said that he was my friend for a while, and then [when] I got to know him, he start being mean to me...beating me up, threatening me, and all of that.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Elyse</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>“I mean through a computer screen it can’t affect me...You can have a persona over the Internet. You can change your beliefs over the Internet, but it’s face-to-face interactions where you truly get a sense of who somebody is. Even if you have these [hurtful] messages piling up constantly, you can just turn Facebook off. You don’t have to look at Facebook.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Felipe</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>“I don’t know if Jessie’s lying about who she is. She might be a catfish. My parents say that... Because she won’t video chat me or meet me. She always backs away whenever I do something like that. I want to video chat, [but] she makes excuses like [technical difficulties] break her Internet.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Gary</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>“I mean he had showed up in my world before because I posted something on this website trying to get people to help me build something. He came into my world, and he started trolling me and stuff...And he kept killing me, and then the next day, he must have gone through my friends or something because he found another guy of mine who was playing Minecraft as well, and he got him. He got on his world, and then I got on his world, and he kept killing me there...I was like [thinking, ‘This guy’s just being a—you know—a douchebag.’]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Harry</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>“Cyberbullying, I just see [it] as cowardice. Because I think that it’s one thing to, you know, mistreat someone to their face because then that’s saying, ‘I have the confidence in myself and in your, I guess, sort of like weak will that nothing will come of it.’ But with cyberbullying it’s like it’s not even that. It’s sort of like it’s just hiding the damage.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Ian 18 12th Grade  “[The Facebook posts] said [untrue] stuff that I'm looking at, and I'm thinking, ‘I don’t want my parents to read people saying stuff like this about me. I don’t want future employers or anybody like that to read this kind of stuff about me.’”

10. Jared 16 9th Grade  “To be more specific: If a person who’s my friend in class says to me, ‘That’s a stupid shirt you have on,’ I would tell him off by saying this, ‘Okay, you may be disrespectful to me, but I’ll say a few sentences about human dignity,’ and he needs to respect my human dignity. Because my parents told me that I don’t need to let random rude comments bother me.”

11. Kyle 16 7th Grade  “My parents don’t let me on the computer at all. They’re afraid I might find something that isn’t very much good. So, I rarely get on the computer.”

12. Laurence 14 8th Grade  “This kid who goes here, Andrew, got suspended because he spat on me on purpose all over my shirt…He’s got anger issues. He’ll say, “I’m going to beat you up,” and then he’ll say other mean stuff like that. He’s gotten suspended more than one time for other reasons.”

13. Matthew 17 9th Grade  “I would basically know who my friends are. There would be some times where I had a whole class that hated me, but I always had that one friend that would stand up for me. I would have a few that would be there for me when it was me versus the world…Because they were bullied too. So, we stuck together.”

Participant Number 1: Adam

Adam, a 15-year-old male Caucasian student in the 10th grade, attends an online-based charter school. Adam earns above average grades in his courses, and he enjoys studying mathematics and biology. His most passionate interests include
mathematics and biology. Adam received a clinical diagnosis on the autism spectrum at age four. He also received clinical diagnoses of other neurological conditions that include ADD/ADHD, learning disabilities, and mixed receptive-expressive language disorder. Adam does not have any medical diagnoses of chronic health conditions.

Adam attends general education classes for the vast majority (76 to 100 percent) of his school day. On average, he meets with friends outside of school one day per week. Adam’s mother reported that he experiences some difficulties conversing with school peers and some difficulties socializing with peers.

**Participant Number 2: Bob**

Bob, a 16-year-old male Caucasian student in the 10th grade, attends a high school in an urban area. Bob earns average grades in school, and he enjoys studying culinary arts, physical education, and language arts. His most passionate interests include sports (NASCAR, NFL, NBA, NHL, MLB), popular music and culture, fashion, health and wellbeing, culinary arts, and technology. Bob received a clinical diagnosis on the autism spectrum at approximately age five. He also received a diagnosis of learning disabilities as a co-occurring neurological condition. Bob does not have any medically diagnosed chronic health conditions.

Bob attends general education classes for most (51 to 75 percent) of his school day. On average, he meets with friends outside of school two days per week. Bob’s mother reported that he experiences some difficulties conversing with school peers and some difficulties socializing with school peers.
Participant Number 3: Conner

Conner, a 13 year-old male Caucasian student in the 7th grade, attends a middle school in a suburban area. Conner earns very above average grades in his courses, and he enjoys studying science, history, and social skills. His most passionate interests include video games and reading. Conner received a clinical diagnosis on the autism spectrum at approximately age 12. He also received diagnoses of other neurological conditions that include ADD/ADHD and learning disabilities. Conner does not have any medical diagnoses of chronic health conditions.

Conner attends general education classes for the vast majority (76 to 100 percent) of his school day. On average, Conner does not meet with friends outside of school. His mom reported that Conner experiences some difficulties conversing with school peers and considerable difficulties socializing with school peers.

Participant Number 4: David

David, a 17 year-old male American Indian student in 10th grade, attends a high school in a suburban area. David earns average grades in his courses, and he enjoys studying mathematics and cooking. His most passionate interests include Legos and watching TV. He received a clinical diagnosis on the autism spectrum at approximately age eight. David also received diagnoses of other neurological conditions that include anxiety, dyslexia, epilepsy, learning disabilities, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), and schizophrenia. He has medical diagnoses of chronic health conditions that include asthma and hyperopia (farsightedness).
David attends general education classes for little (0 to 25 percent) of his school day. On average, he does not meet with friends outside of school. David’s mother reported that he experiences some difficulties communicating with school peers and considerable trouble socializing with school peers. David sometimes uses sign language and a typing device to communicate with others.

*Participant Number 5: Felipe*

Felipe, a 17 year-old Hispanic-American student in the 12th grade, attends a high school in a suburban area. Felipe earns very above average grades, and he enjoys studying mathematics and subjects in the humanities (e.g., history). His most passionate interests include computers, music, games, writing fantasy, and animals. Felipe received a clinical diagnosis on the autism spectrum at approximately age 9. He also received diagnoses of other neurological conditions that include ADD/ADHD and anxiety. Felipe does not have medically diagnosed chronic health conditions.

Felipe attends general education classes for the vast majority (76 to 100 percent) of his school day. On average, he meets with friends outside of school one day per week. Felipe’s mother reported that he experiences some difficulties conversing with school peers and some difficulties socializing with school peers.

*Participant Number 6: Elyse*

Elyse, a 15 year-old female Caucasian student in the 10th grade, attends a high school in a suburban area. Elyse earns above average grades in her classes, and she enjoys studying all school subjects. Her most passionate interests include reading,
drawing, playing computer games, and theatre. Elyse received a clinical diagnosis on the autism spectrum at approximately age six. She also received diagnoses of other neurological conditions that include ADD/ADHD, anxiety, depression, and sensory integration disorder. Elyse has medical diagnosed chronic health conditions that include allergies and an autoimmune condition.

Elyse attends general education classes for the vast majority (76 to 100 percent) of her school day. On average, she does not meet with friends outside of school. Elyse's parents report that she experiences some difficulties conversing with school peers and does not usually socialize with school peers.


Participant Number 7: Gary

Gary, a 15 year-old male Caucasian student in the 10th grade, attends a high school in an urban area. Gary earns above average grades in his classes, and he enjoys studying science, mathematics, and computer design. His most passionate interests include playing video games on the computer, fly fishing, playing golf, drawing, creating 3D designs, photography, and model trains. Gary received a clinical diagnosis on the autism spectrum during kindergarten. He also received a clinical diagnosis of ODD (oppositional defiant disorder), a psychiatrically diagnosed condition. Gary has the medically diagnosed chronic health condition of delayed puberty.

Gary attends general education classes for most (51 to 75 percent) of his school day. On average, he meets with friends outside of school three days per week.
Gary’s mother reports that he experiences some difficulties conversing with school peers and considerable difficulties socializing with peers.

Participant Number 8: Harry

Harry, a 17 year-old Caucasian student in the 12th grade, attends a high school in an urban area. Harry earns very above average grades, and he enjoys studying music (e.g., orchestra, symphonic band, men’s choir) in school. His most passionate interests include playing music with the upright bass, violin, tuba, guitar, and electric bass; and singing. Harry received a clinical diagnosis on the autism spectrum in 2001. He does not have any clinical diagnoses of other neurological conditions. Harry also does not have any medical diagnoses of chronic health conditions.

Harry attends general education classes for the vast majority (76 to 100 percent) of his school day. On average, Harry meets with friends outside of school six days per week. Harry’s mother reported that he has no difficulties conversing with school peers and no difficulties socializing with school peers.

Participant Number 9: Ian

Ian, an 18 year-old male Caucasian student in the 12th grade, attends a high school in a rural area. Ian earns average grades in his courses, and he enjoys studying history in school. His most passionate interests include parks and rides, trains, and magic. Ian received a clinical diagnosis on the autism spectrum at approximately age six. He also received diagnoses of other neurological conditions that include
depression, learning disabilities, a visual perceptual disability, and a phonological processing disability. His medically diagnosed chronic health conditions include allergies, asthma, and a sleep condition.

Ian attends general education classes for the vast majority (76 to 100 percent) of his school day. On average, he does not meet with friends outside of school during the week. Ian's mother reported that he experiences some difficulty conversing with school peers and considerable difficulties socializing with school peers.

**Participant Number 10: Jared**

Jared, a 16 year-old male Caucasian student in the 9th grade, attends ninth grade at a high school in an urban area. Jared earns above average grades in his courses, and he enjoys studying entrepreneurship and history in school. His most passionate interests include writing and religious studies. Jared received a clinical diagnosis on the autism spectrum at approximately age six. He also received diagnoses of other neurological conditions that include ADD/ADHD, anxiety, and learning disabilities. He does not have any medically diagnosed chronic health conditions.

Jared attends general education classes for the vast majority (76 to 100 percent) of his school day. On average, he meets with friends outside school less than one day per week. Jared’s mother reported that he experiences some difficulty conversing with peers and considerable difficulty socializing with peers.
Participant Number 11: Kyle

Kyle, a 16 year-old male Caucasian student, attends seventh grade at a middle school in an urban area. Kyle earns average grades in his courses, and he enjoys studying science and history in school. His most passionate interests include Pokémon, video games on the Nintendo DS handheld system, and watching television shows. Kyle received a clinical diagnosis on the autism spectrum at approximately age six. He also received diagnoses of other neurological conditions that include ADD/ADHD, dyslexia, and a mathematical learning disability. Kyle has medically diagnosed chronic health conditions that include allergies and strabismus in his right eye.

Kyle attends general education classes for the vast majority (76 to 100 percent) of his school day. On average, he does not meet with friends outside of school during the week. Kyle's mother reported that he experiences no trouble conversing with peers and some trouble socializing with peers.

Participant Number 12: Laurence

Laurence, a 14 year-old male Caucasian student, attends eighth grade at a middle school in an urban area. Laurence earns above average grades in his courses, and he enjoys studying science in school. His most passionate interests include meteorology and geography. Laurence received a clinical diagnosis on the autism spectrum in 2003. He also received a neurological diagnosis of Tourette Syndrome. Laurence has a medically diagnosed chronic health condition of myopia.
Laurence attends general education classes for the vast majority (76 to 100 percent) of his school day. On average, he does not meet with friends outside of school during the week. Laurence’s mother reported that he experiences some trouble conversing with peers and considerable trouble socializing with peers.

Participant Number 13: Matthew

Matthew, a 17 year-old male Caucasian student, attends ninth grade at a high school in an urban area. Matthew earns very above average grades in his courses, and he enjoys studying history and science in school. His most passionate interests include animation, art, bowling, and basketball. Matthew received a clinical diagnosis on the autism spectrum at age three. He also received other neurological diagnoses of anxiety and learning disabilities. Matthew has a medically diagnosed chronic health condition of allergies.

Matthew attends general education courses for the vast majority (76 to 100 percent) of his school day. His mom reported that he experiences some trouble conversing with peers and some trouble socializing with peers.

Identification of Themes

After completing each interview for the study, the researcher reflected on patterns and trends in the data that had emerged thus far. These emerging patterns and trends informed initial development of potential themes.

The six themes for this study listed below aligned with the study’s research questions:

T1. Bullying Shapes Autistic Youths’ Experiences, Emotions, and Perceptions
T2. Face-to-Face Bullying Exerts Greater Physical Control

T3. Ignoring/Avoiding Cyber- and Face-to-Face Bullying: A Defensive Strategy

T4. Parental Monitoring Deters Cyberbullying

T5. Social-Cultural Barriers Can Hinder Reporting Bullying

T6. Assistance from Allies to Address Cyber- and Face-to-Face Bullying

T1. Bullying Shapes Autistic Youths’ Experiences, Emotions, and Perceptions

Participants frequently conceived of bullying as a form of harassment that could cause distress and harm to victims. They saw bullying as having a critical emotional element to it. One participant, Adam, described face-to-face bullying as “harassment of a person—both emotion and physical, and it doesn’t just mean with, say, a kid or a teenager. It goes all the way up to any age. [It’s] not just in school, as well, but in say, business or in other real-life scenarios." Another participant, Ian, conceived of face-to-face bullying as “when people [malignantly] tease me, or make fun of me, or do [other] stuff that I don’t like. A lot of my close friends definitely tease each other a lot and stuff, but it’s not mean teasing or whatever."

Bob emphasized that this harassment intended to make others feel sad or otherwise bad emotionally. He shared in his view of bullying:

I think of kids acting in a wrong manner toward other kids their age or around their age, hurting them, making them feel uncomfortable, making them feel sad, trying to make them feel said about themselves as if they don’t belong to others.

Harry emphasized how uncertainty sometimes existed about when friendly teasing
shifted into bullying. He felt, however, that emotional hurt often marked a sign of bullying. Harry described:

It’s often hard to figure out when it’s crossing the line
trolling/bullying instead of just jocularity of some kind. Like I think usually a pretty good way of telling that ... like the best that you can usually do is see how the [other] person responds to it. ... Obviously, if they’re emotionally... If they’re emotionally or physically hurt by it, then obviously that’s a sign that it’s probably crossing the line.

Study participants similarly described cyber-bullying as distressful harassment with an emotional connection. Adam shared, “It’s an emotional, more emotional than physical since it’s online. But, even then, it’s as strong maybe not stronger, but it can really change a person. It can affect a person. They teach [about] it as well in school. They told one story of a how a kid was so affected by it that he had to hang himself.” Describing his view of cyberbullying Bob noted, “I think of people calling other people names through text messaging or sending harsh threatening emails or messages in a way [intended] to make other people feel uncomfortable.” Harry noted how he saw this bullying of individuals online as a sign of cowardice for attacking people anonymously. He shared:

Cyberbullying I just see as cowardice. Because I think that it’s one thing to, you know, mistreat someone to their face because then that’s saying, “I have the confidence in myself and in your...weak will that nothing will come out of it.” But with cyberbullying, it's like not even that. It's sort of like it's just
hiding the damage. Sort of like where the damage is the main point instead of just the entertainment value or whatever.

This intense harassment from both cyber- and face-to-face bullying deeply affected participants’ lives and experiences in many ways. The following section describes how bullying affected participants' focused interests and activities and their educational experiences.

**Victimization Targeting Focused Interests and Activities**

A subset of participants of this study faced cyber- or face-to-face bullying that targeted one or more of their focused interests. (The earlier section in this chapter about participants’ individual backgrounds describes their focused interests.) Deeply connected to their focused interests as a source of identity and meaning, participants shared highly emotional reactions to this form of bullying. As described in Chapters 1 and 2, autistic people’s focused interests (known clinically as *special interests*) often consume high amounts of their time and energy. Their focused interests also often serve as the basis for long-term careers as autistic adults transition from childhood into adult life. Thus, bullying directed at their focused interests can often feel very painful for autistic people.

Ian, who has a focused interest in carnivals, had a job facilitating rides and other activities at a summer carnival. He faced intensive cognitive bullying from a youth he knew from church. Ian’s church ran the carnival at which he worked. He
shared how the bullying he experienced hurt him deeply because of its personal connection to his focused interest:

Then, two weeks later at one of the spots we were at when we were taking all the rides apart and stuff, he said something to me, and he just made me mad, and it was to the point where I just locked the doors in our work truck and called my parents and told them to come get me, come take me home. ... I mean, it was to the point where I tried to quit probably three times, and my Sunday school teacher said, “No, I know how much you like doing this. You just need to ignore it. Kind of let it go.” ... I was just kind of angry and upset because carnivals are my life. When I grow up, I’d like to own my own carnival and run one. So, I know much about it and stuff, and I understand the mechanics of the rides and stuff. And for him to just say some of the stuff he said to me made me feel really upset.

Ian also has a focused interest on magic. He works professionally as a magician performing shows for the public. I shared how bullies also targeted his interest in magic to harm him:

I’m a magician, and a lot of times, kids will go up to me and say, “You’re not a real magician,” or make fun about my magic and stuff—even though they still have no idea how I do it. [It happens] at least once a week. It’s usually the same group of individuals and stuff. ... I’ve known them for a long time and stuff. And so it’s been one of those things where it’s gone on and stuff, and I just get made fun of a lot because I’m not athletic and stuff. ... I mean, there
had been stuff for a while that people would make fun of me about: my magic
and stuff. That’s one of my favorite things, other than carnivals. I mean I do
magic all the time. I perform shows, and I’m a certified magician [and]
hypnotist. ... And, I mean, it’s one of those things where I look at it as I’m
doing something that nobody else can do. They would never be able to do
this. I’ve performed with people on ‘America’s Got Talent’. I mean [I
performed alongside] just these huge individuals in the magic industry. And
the fact that they say that...It just kind of makes me mad.

Another participant, Gary, has a focused interest in video gaming. He particularly
feels passionate about building worlds on Minecraft. Gary shared how another user
of Minecraft had cyberbullied him after he sought assistance to build a world in the
online game:

I mean he had showed up in my world before because I posted something on
this website trying to get people to help me build something. He came into
my world, and he started trolling me and stuff...And he kept killing me, and
then the next day, he must have gone through my friends or something
because he found another guy of mine who was playing Minecraft as well,
and he got him. He got on his world, and then I got on his world, and he kept
killing me there. ... I make all my worlds ‘Invite Only’ now. This is on the
game Minecraft, by the way. ... I was like [thinking], “This guy’s just being a—
you know—[a] douchebag”... I was kind of [feeling] frustrated with the fact
that he was killing me.
In addition to affecting their focused interests, bullying also shaped the K-12 educational experiences of participants. Participants described vivid recollections of how bullies harassed them both at school and on the trip to school. Conner recalled how one bully would taunt him by making sounds that only he could hear (As discussed in Chapter 1, autistic youth sometimes have hypersensitive hearing):

Back then, they just made sounds that they knew annoyed me. If I tried to ignore them, they wouldn’t stop. They’d find something more annoying. In fourth grade, my teacher Miss Johnson ... I tried to tell her [about the] other kids. ... She said [to me], “It’s my actions [that I should focus on], and it doesn’t matter what the people do.” ... And Paul back in elementary school, he just knew the right volume to make it so I could hear it but no one else could...because no one [else], literally no one [else] would hear him.

Conner’s mother further elaborated on her son’s memories of the bullying victimization. She shared how his bullying experiences extended beyond the sound making into intense physical and cognitive bullying of Conner on his school bus:

Kids make noises only Conner can hear, and laugh [repeatedly at him]. They get a reaction every time. Last year, he was unable to ride the bus because of being bullied. ... When they took Conner’s phone, I was on the phone with him, and I heard [the background conversation]. So, I [also] heard Conner, and he cried. I was on the phone, and I heard [him] say, “Hey, give me back my phone! ... [He] cried an awful lot on the bus, and [he] got mad, and he
would get off the bus [feeling upset]. He’d yell and scream to get off the bus. They made fun of [him], and his brother and [Ken] were both on the bus, and I think in the beginning they tried to sort of help, but the kids were bigger and older. ... Once they touched him and took his phone physically. Once it became physical, that was it. We talked to the school. We talked to the bus driver, and things would get better for a while. But then, why make a kid miserable everyday when I can actually just go pick him up.

Another participant, David, also experienced bullying on his school bus that included theft of his personal property. He shared how students who bullied him stole his backpack:

I was on the bus, and I was sitting on the front seat behind the bus driver. I looked out the window for a minute, and [then] I looked back, and my backpack was gone. Then when I got off the bus, the kid threw it back at me. He threw it in the back of the bus and hid it from me until I got off the bus. ... These kids threatened me on the bus. ... [One kid] punched me on the bus, and he told me that, “You need to back up!”

David regularly experienced other physical attacks at school. He recalled how school peers would assault him frequently and sometimes even feign friendship to hurt him. David shared:

I was trying to sit down and the kids pulled the chair from behind me. ... I fell. [The kids] just laughed. [I felt] upset [and] angry when they did that.
Basically, the other people who did it lied [about the incident]. ... [My parents] called the school. Then the teachers talked to the kids, and they still lied. ... [Kids] threatened me and called me hurtful names. ... These kids threatened me and [said] that they're gonna come kill me and shoot me. I was on the bus, and he said he was gonna come to my house and kill me and all that. ... They just keep getting on the bus ... and started beating the crap out of me and punching me. And [I told] my therapist. They just talked to the kids and they still lied. ... He said that he was my friend for a while, and then when I got to know him he started beating me up. [After] I knew him for a while, [and] then he said I’ll be your friend. ... Then he started being mean to me, beating me up, and threatening me and all that.

Like David, Ian, and Conner, Gary also experienced physical bullying that sometimes involved theft of his property. He recalled vividly one episode in which bullies stole his ball and tossed it around him. Ian shared:

They kind of play[ed] like [the game of] Monkey in the Middle if you know what I mean. They’ll just pass the ball around, [and] they won't let me have it. They just keep trying to keep it away from me because they think I’m annoying. [It happens] just like in gym [class]. They’ll take a ball that I’m using. They’ll just start passing it [around] or kicking [it] in between me so I can’t get it. It was like every day in gym, but I only have gym for half a year out of half the school year, which is only half the year. ... It just made me feel that I really had no friends. I really was just a ... you know, a guy that was just
left out. I felt really depressed [at the time]. ... This was back in gym [class] when I was in [the] tenth grade.

Ian experienced a theft of his iPod that led him on an effort to prove that someone else’s iPod actually belonged to him. He recalled how this individual had feigned friendship with him to get to his stuff. Ian shared:

[This one kid] was real buddy-buddy with me at the beginning of the school year and was real nice and sat beside me and stuff we did a lot of stuff together. And then my iPod went missing, and then a couple of days later he was just all of sudden real mean to me and stuff, and I couldn’t figure out why. I couldn’t find my iPod and was searching all over the place. In fact, I got a new iPod and stuff. ... [One day] he was listening to an iPod, and I’m like, “That looks like my iPod”. I’m like [feeling], “That looks [exactly] the same as my iPod. I asked him about it, and [I] said, “You know I lost my iPod. Have you seen it or anything?” And he’s like, “No, I haven’t,” and then I asked him again a bit later. He again said, “No, no, I haven’t!” ... I went home and got on the computer and looked through serial numbers of iPods connected to the computer to find the one that was mine, and [I] took [that information] into school. [I] said [to school authorities], “This is the serial number of my iPod. I got it off the computer. [I] said, “I think he has [my iPod]. Will you check?” And they looked at it, and it was the same [serial number].

Harry regularly experienced physically bullying during his years in middle school.
He shared how another student who physically assaulted him also cognitively bullied him with frequent insults. Harry recalled:

Back then, some of [these kids] just were terrible. Like maybe not so much toward me as with some of the other autistic kids but still [it hurt]. ... One time at recess: you know the 15-minute thing that our teachers would give us to go outside and expand any post-lunch energy before having to go off to our sixth period classes. The one time a kid without warning just threw a giant ball at me. It was like one of those big...yoga type things, so it’s not like...I mean it stung [quite] a little bit. ... This kids was like one of the main people I had problems with. [He] mostly just liked trash talk[ed] to me ... like insults ... pretty regularly. ... I'm not sure that every day would be accurate, but maybe like a few times a week. [It was] pretty consistently [happening] throughout the year. [I felt] aggravated, you know, distressed [and] generally just feeling unpleasant about it both in the sense that “Oh no, there’s something wrong with me.” and also “Why are you being such a jerk towards me?” kind of stuff.

Harry recalled another episode of physical bullying in which other kids who regularly bullied him locked him in a gymnasium space. He shared:

The other physical instance ... The other major one was whenever I was locked in a [gymnasium]. It was during gym class, and at Hill View School the gymnasium can be separated into thirds: like they have those retractable walls. During the one gym class the one day, I saw a ball go back in that like
alcove. So, I went back there to retrieve it, and then as I was turning around a kid shuts part of the wall and traps me in there right? ... It was very literally the feeling of being trapped. Maybe it was just the combination of the small space, [but] it also suddenly became really dark. I was separated from all of [my] other peers, and it was right near the end of the period. I was afraid I wouldn't get to my next class on time. ... I saw very clearly which kids did it. ... They would be regularly. ... One of them actually, actually really one of them was behind it and being the regular bully towards me. And he was usually just like talking shit about me and like occasionally being more physical like that [gymnasium] instance. Mostly he just...like generally [would be] just calling me stuff like 'Retard!', 'Faggot!', [and] stuff like that.

Sometimes, the physically bullying participants experienced in school involved non-direct contact. Laurence recalled an episode in which a bully who harassed him verbally spit on him. He described:

This kid who goes here, Bob Nateman, got suspended because he spat on me on purpose all over my shirt. ... He’s got anger issues. ... Sometimes he’ll say, “I’m going to beat you up, and then he’ll say other mean stuff like that. He’s gotten suspended more than one time for other reasons.
Laurence’s mother recalled how her son would not handle these instances of bullying well. She shared:

Laurence doesn’t deal with bullying well. He gets very upset and very loud. …

He tells his family about it, and [it] takes awhile for him to calm down.

Bullying for him happened mostly in the school system. Teachers did nothing to help. It doesn’t happen much at this school [he attends now].”

Participants also experienced emotionally bullying in school in which other students spread gossip and rumors about them. Ian recalled a period of bullying in which other students spread a rumor about his sexuality. He described how he felt particularly hurt by the rumors because he supported empowerment of LGBT people. Ian shared:

There were rumors going around and stuff that I’m gay. People have been doing that for two or three years now. It’s one of those things where I just kind of let it go. It’s all the same [group of kids]. It’s really hurting and upsetful because I’m not gay, and my retort is, “What if I was gay? Would that make you think different of me?” And I tell them that I have a lot of friends who are gay … and I don’t mind that issue. I’m very open towards that. … I think they took the kids into the office, and they talked to them about how it was unacceptable to be calling [other] people names like that. … Our school, actually, for a couple years now has had an anti-bullying policy, which has helped out a lot with the way stuff’s been handled.
Harry remembered experiencing similar instances of students bullying him by fabricating rumors about his sexuality. He recalled how this rumor had a basis in his physical appearance: Harry described:

Also one of the malicious ones being spread around more in like seventh grade, but I think it started in earlier in sixth grade was like the rumor going around that I was gay, which at the time especially when you're just trying to figure out. ... This was right at the onset of puberty. Let me preface this by saying that I am not homophobic in any sense of the word. ... I was [just] trying to figure myself out and like this rumor going around that I like men didn’t help things. ... At the time, especially at the time it was more just like really confusing and sort of like ‘Would you just give me space?’ I think like some of the stuff that maybe fueled some of the rumors was like: ... Back then, I wore my hair longer than most kids and obviously I still do wear it much longer than most of the kids in my grade. ... And also [I was] like not trying to act super sixth grade macho [with] “O, look at me. I’m such a boy”. ... Kids are so stupid so they’re like, “Oh, he has long hair, and he doesn’t try to act as macho as possible. He must be gay.’

Harry also experienced another rumor about his political beliefs. He recalled how other students started a rumor that he was a Nazi. Harry shared:

There was another rumor started by this very delightful kid. I mentioned, “Ooh I want to take German as my language” because I like have German ancestry and I think that German's actually a cool language to learn. It's also
pretty helpful because that helps you understand English since a lot of English is derived from that. And this kid, being such the delightful kid that he is, started telling people that I was a Nazi...[that I wanted] to kill the gays and Jews, all hail Hitler. I remember [feeling] particularly kind of [like I had] died. My one friend... In the lunch line John (the bully) told him, and he just turned around and was like, “Do you even realize how extreme that rumor is? Like that is actually slander... Afterwards I was just like, “Thank you”.

**T2. Face-to-Face Bullying Exerts Greater Control over Physical Activities**

As discussed in the previous theme, face-to-face bullying exerted considerable dominance and control over the physical aspects of participants' lives. For instance, face-to-face bullying facilitated theft of participants’ personal property. Additionally, face-to-face interactions also enabled bullies to physically assault participants. Limited to virtual interactions over the computer and other devices, cyberbullying did not directly affect participants’ physical lives. Elyse expressed how this intrinsic limitation of cyberbullying enabled her to have some control over its effect on her emotions and life experience. She shared:

> I mean through a computer screen it can’t affect me. ...You can have a persona over the Internet. You can change your beliefs over the Internet, but it’s face-to-face interactions where you truly get a sense of who somebody is. Even if you have these [hurtful] messages piling up constantly, you can just turn Facebook off. You don’t have to look at Facebook. I mean Facebook is just a book picture of a Face. I mean that’s all the meaning is. [The messages on
Facebook] don’t have expressions. ... It matters to me about how people treat each other, and how people think of each other—how things affect each other. I care more about person-to-person interactions [face-to-face]. ...
When I’m talking to you face-to-face, your face can belie the things you say. You can’t do that through any other medium [including the Internet].

At the same time, a lack of a physical connection between cyber-bullying and the real world increased uncertainty about whether cyberbullying exists in a situation. For instance, Felipe’s mother felt concerned that his online relationship might represent bullying. She perceived certain aspects of his online relationship with a youth from another country as a sign of potential catfishing. (Catfishing represents a fake online relationship in which an individual uses the nature of anonymity on the Internet to fool someone else.) Describing this online relationship, Felipe shared:

I don’t know if Kendra’s lying about who she is. She’s a very unfortunate woman, or if she’s doing something for whatever reason and lying about who she is. ... She might be a catfish. My parents say that. I don’t see why she’d go through all the trouble of pretending most of the time. She’s the one who’s getting annoyed about what I say. ... She won’t video chat or meet me. She always backs away whenever I do something like that. I want to video chat her, [but] she makes excuses like [somethings] break her Internet. ... She says that she doesn’t trust me, but I think she’ll trust me eventually. I don’t know what would ever become of our friendship because she’s never going to meet me in person.
Bob, who has a focused interest on sports, enjoys posting comments about his teams on his Facebook page. He recalled how other people posted negative comments in response to his messages that verbally attacked him:

One kid would call me stupid or an idiot because of maybe what I do and maybe he doesn’t like that. ... I guess what I post on Facebook: [It’s] a reaction.

Bob’s mother elaborated on his descriptions of the cyberbullying attacks on his Facebook page. She described how Bob had trouble determining that regular negative comments posted on his page reflected cyberbullying.

My concern is mainly cyberbullying. There are lots of hurtful comments directed towards my child. We have over the years had many conversations about why they are posted, how a person can post them, and what [my child] should think and do [in response]. [They said things like:] ‘You post too many photos’, [and] ‘You are a loser’. [They made] comments also on my child’s favorite NFL team winning—there are [many] putdowns for that. My child has often been able to gauge people in person fairly well, but online it’s harder to tell. So, sarcasm is harder for him to ‘get’. He has gotten ‘lashback’ comments on the stuff he posts [on Facebook] (e.g., his NFL team wins).

**T3. Ignoring/Avoiding Cyber- and Face-to-Face Bullying: A Defensive Strategy**

The participants in the study predominantly described a defensive strategy against bullying that involved: a) avoid/ignore and b) walk away. When faced with harassment from a bully (online or offline), they frequently sought to ignore the
bully’s harmful actions and comments. As needed, the participants walked away from a situation physically or virtually to distance themselves from the bully’s activities.

Ian recalled how he had learned this strategy from teachers at school. He shared how teachers had also emphasized that he should try to think of positive thought while ignoring bullying or walking away from it. Ian described:

There were a lot of school-related bullying classes. As you know, teachers don’t want any bullying. They don’t want any bullying whatsoever in school. They want everybody to be a working machine [and] be helpful with one another. I liked that view. I really did. I think it was a god view. But, I noticed other people that were immature ... [Teachers said] report to a teacher if you are harassed emotionally or physically. “Don’t keep it in,” they say. ‘Don’t fight back as well.” That’s one of the bigger things: “Don’t fight back. Just sort of walk away if you can”. I think that was most of the message. They told us to...I remember that they told us to think of a good memory and to rely on that to get you through it. I don’t know if I’m going to take that [harassment]. I’m just going to walk away [from it and] continue on with [my] day. ... I don’t think I ever responded to a person saying something [negative] toward me. I just sort of kept [on] walking. I actually sort of censored them out when they spoke. It helped. I will admit that it did help.
Harry described how he had learned to ignore bullying as a common sense type of strategy. He shared:

Especially back in middle school they were trying to teach me. I think that a lot of methods I would use if I were bullied ... are probably just that common sense stuff. Like, if someone's being a dick toward me, then [I should] just ignore them. Like, there are some kids at the high school, not particularly towards me alone, but just like in general are just bad people. ... The attitude towards them I take is they’re not really worth my time.

Elyse recalled how teachers and others had taught her to ignore the frequent mean comments that bullies made. She shared:

I mean I’m certain I’ve overheard a ton of mean things said about me. It’s just that I ignored them. I pretended that I didn’t hear them. I know I was told to do that. I know that.

Bob sometimes coupled the defensive strategy of ignoring or walking away from bullying with other approaches. He described the use of retorts inform the bully of the problems with their actions. Bob described:

[I've learned to] walk away from the situation—just [to] leave it alone and try not to get involved. Other ways are to maybe tell the bully to stop what they’re doing [while] possibly ignoring them. And then, [I’ve also learned] mentioning to the bully that they are treating [me] wrong and that they
should treat others nicely [and like] how they enjoy being treated
[themselves].

Reinforcing this strategy of ignore/walk away, participants described how they had
taught it to their children to help them cope with bullying. Some of the participants’
parents shared their belief that to ignore bullies would reduce their power and
influence. For instance, Kyle’s mother noted, “We have tried to teach him to just
walk away from the situation. Do not give the bully the opportunity to continue
bullying.” Bob’s mother emphasized to her son not to act out against bullies in
retaliation while ignoring bullies’ activities. She noted how she had taught him to:

Let the bad stuff go—Don’t retaliate. We are religious, and we discuss
‘turning it over to God’ and that takes pressure off of you to have to have to
correct this person’s bad behavior online. It has been a long process, but now
my child will post positive comments sort of like a “retaliation”.

Sometimes, participants successfully learned to ignore bullying taught them
by their parents, teachers, and others. However, they had trouble making use of this
strategy in real life situations.

Harry shared how the size of the school’s student body affected his ability to
ignore bullying from his peers. Whereas he felt it easier to ignore bullying in high
school, he described encountering more difficulties doing so in the smaller middle
school.
Harry described:

Tollersville High is a large enough high school that you can get away with just avoiding people because it’s some 2,500 kids. It’s not like say Hill Middle School where ... I don’t even know how many kids went to Hill Middle School whenever I was there. But, the point is there were far fewer kids, and thus you’re more likely to have to deal with the kids who are giving you grief.

While at the high school, it’s like... I think it also helps that the kids who were generally giving me grief in middle school: I’m at least one or two (I guess) levels of intelligence above them in terms of the classes that I take. ... I was unlike a lot of kids in that I was excited about the prospect of going to school. ... I see school now as being more of an opportunity to make friends and see friends that I’ve already made, as well as to prepare not to be poor when I’m an adult.

Elyse described how she could ignore the actual actions of bullying but not the emotional impact the bullying had on her. She shared:

It’s really less about what they did to me as much as [how] they treated me, I think. I mean they made me feel like I wasn’t even human. I was treated as though I wasn’t even half a human being. ... The fact that they disregarded my existence is really what hurt the most. I don’t care about what’s done to me because I mean actions can be ignored. It’s... For me, it’s feelings. ... [The bullying] did quite a number on my self-esteem and everything. ... After a while, things stack up and you begin to think that of yourself. I think the real
issue is preventing things from stacking up that high because in order to break down a person’s self-esteem to that point where they don’t even feel like they’re worth anything, I think that should be a sin in itself. ... I mean you can give people as much of a defense as you like, but those words and everything will still find a way to permeate it. It’s a cruel world. For example, my mom told me sticks and stones may break my bones, but words may never hurt me or words can never hurt you. ... I knew that wasn’t true. ... No matter what you know intellectually, if you hear it enough times you will believe it [true].

Conner recalled how he found it difficult to ignore bullying for any long length of time. He shared:

The only thing I can do is [to] walk away. If I ignore them, they’re just going to try to do something more annoying. Even then, I can’t even...even if they don’t think of that I can’t ignore them for long. Eventually, I just can’t do it any more. I was ignoring them really well at the beginning of the year, but I just can’t do it any more.

Gary’s mother recalled how her son had learned to ignore bullies, but he had difficulty doing so when needed in fast-moving situations. She shared:

He has learned strategies (e.g., walking away), but it is hard for him to apply [the strategies] in the heat of the moment. ... He did do social stories and things like that in elementary school. ... They would discuss what happened
and what he should have done [differently] and try to get that into his brain
how to respond correctly. But, he’s impulsive, so it was hard for him to apply.

**T4. Parental Monitoring of Online Activities Deters Cyberbullying Threats**

Participants’ parents frequently reported that they regularly observed their
children’s use of computers and other devices connected to the Internet. For
instance, Matthew’s mother expressed the assertion: “I check on everything
[online]!” Likewise, David’s mother noted: “I watch him use the device.”

This type of active parental observation of participants’ online activities
often reflected the parents’ continuing concerns about online victimization of their
children. Participants’ parents shared concerns both about the need for their
children to stay vigilant and understand the ill intentions of some people online.
Kyle’s mother noted her concern about making sure that her son understood the
fundamental nature of the Internet as a place with good and bad pursuits: “We have
explained that while technology is good most of the time, are some things that are
bad too.” Elyse’s mother described her concern about her daughter’s use of websites
that facilitated social interaction with complete strangers. She shared:

I am VERY concerned. Her brother recently came to me [feeling] worried
because Elyse was on a website [called] “Talk to a stranger” that she linked
up with through a Facebook page—everything nerdy and in between. Elyse
has not been available to hear my concerns, her brother’s [concerns], or her
father’s concerns about going to such a website—the safety issues, etc. We
are working on this with her school team and in therapy.
In some cases, participants’ parents adopted sophisticated ways to monitor online activities beyond first-hand observation. Harry’s mother described how she monitored her son’s Facebook activities by directly accessing his account. She shared: “I have access to his password to [Facebook], and [I] will occasionally ask him who different people are to make sure he knows everyone.” Bob’s mother described how she would seek out the support of Facebook friends to help monitor her son’s online activities. She stated, “I also have a Facebook account and have friends who will ‘pick things up’ and alert me.” Bob’s mother also described a more complex strategy that she uses to monitor regularly her son’s online activities. She reported this strategy for online monitoring as a multi-step process:

1. I need to see the back of my child’s head—so I can glance at the [computer] screen as well.
2. The [computer] screen has to be on bright—not dimmed.
3. Periodically, I examine the [browsing] history for the day, and I discuss it with my child.
4. Periodically I ask the following questions:

   Have you recently gone to a pornographic site? A site with wounds and weapons? A site I find objectionable? A site I find violent or sexual?

   Have you recently posted a comment with a swear word? A photo of
yourself from the waist down? A naked photo? A naked photo of someone else?

Have you recently forwarded a comment or photo that is violent? Naked? Compromising to that person?

Similarly, Harry’s mother described an intricately detailed set of activities that she teaches her son not to do online. She actively monitors his online activities to ensure his compliance with this set of rules:

He knows he is not permitted to put pictures online without first asking for permission [from us].

He is not permitted to download anything [from the Internet] without permission [from us].

He may not accept friend requests [on Facebook] without knowing the person individually.

He may not share a picture on Facebook without first unlinking it to the source.

Participants’ parents also frequently described how they placed limitations or restrictions on their children’s technology usage to decrease the risk of online harm. For instance, Jared’s mother noted: “We have [online] blocks on computers and phones.” The types of parental controls adopted by participants’ parents commonly restricted participants’ access to online social media, email, or websites.
Placing their restrictions on online technology use, participants’ parents repeatedly expressed safety concerns about their children’s usage of websites with unacceptable content. They sometimes referred to prior approved websites that they allowed their children to visit. For instance, Matthew’s mother stated that she told her child: “Do not click on or go to any website that is not ours.” In addition to white lists of approved websites, physical locations of participants’ website access also facilitated their parents’ oversight. Kyle’s mother described how her kitchen served as a safe place in which she could effectively monitor his Web use:

> We have parental controls for his safety in navigating the Web. He is only allowed to the use [the] laptop or iPad in the kitchen when we can oversee what he is looking up. His phone does not have [access to the] Internet, so he uses it strictly for talk (calls) and text [messaging].

Likewise, parentally placed time limits on participants’ online activities served to limit what they explored. Laurence’s mother described how these time limits functioned in conjunction with online activity restrictions that she termed locks:

> I check on him every ten minutes, and there are locks. He has to have permission before he gets on the computer. He has a 30-minute time limit. We have locks on the computer so he can only go into certain websites.

Sometimes, parental monitoring or blocking participants’ online activities engendered participants’ feeling of intrusion on their individual privacy rights. Participants’ parents described how these feelings of intrusion played a key role in
sparking participants’ reactions or retaliations against them. For instance, Elyse’s mother shared: “The problem is that my daughter is highly reactive, and [she] interprets my efforts to engage for her safety as being critical. I step on eggshells around this high tension.” Felipe’s mother described how her child or another child might react to the intrusion on his privacy by bypassing online controls on online activities. She noted: “But at the end, [online use] has to be based on an honor system since kids are too smart. ... [They] can easily bypass controls on their online activities, [and] erase [Web] browsing activities.”

**T5. Social-Cultural Barriers Hinder Reporting Bullying to Authorities**

As described in Chapter 2, the literature on bullying of youth indicates that reporting bullying to authorities represents a critical way to deal with it. Participants encountered success to report bullying and achieved a meaningful action from authorities when authorities knew them well. Ian described how his boss at the carnival understands him and acted to help him handle bullying because of that. He shared: “She understands where I’m coming from. ... My Sunday school teacher said, ‘I know how much you like doing this. You just need to ignore it—kind of let it go.’” Ian noted how his boss helped him to address bullying.

In other cases, participants frequently faced less supportive attitudes from authorities when they report bullying to teachers, parents, and other authorities. Sometimes participants reported bullying to authorities, but bullies then lied about their actions. This resulted in no meaningful action happening because the persons in authority believed the bullies’ stories.
Elyse recalled how she sought to report incidents of other girls harassing her. She sought help from the school guidance off, but they did not address the problem. Elyse shared:

The guidance counselor, Ms. Drotman: She was really inept. She knew nothing about middle school kids, and she was a guidance counselor. The solution they always suggested was, “Make more friends, Elyse. Get friends,” which totally failed because they had ruined, spoiled any options, any hope, any future I had f making friends in that school. The principal of that school got... There was the principal, me, and Nancy Donaldson in her office ... I was like, “This is pointless. She’s going to deny it anyways. I mean really.” You know how girls act like they’re like, “Oh I didn’t mean to [do it], and it’s just like,” “F*** yes you did. She wasn’t even acting. ... It was just so obvious that she knew she’d get away with it, scot-free. ... I think the [bigger] bullying was done by the school [in not addressing it well]. I mean the kids can do whatever they want and that will leave a mark, sure, but the biggest mark is left by the authority systems that are put in place to prevent this stuff and fail to do anything.

Elyse’s mother elaborated on how her daughter experienced additional problems with bullying in an outdoor education setting. Her mom reported a problem that her daughter experienced to try to solve the issue:

I will use the outdoor education [example] because I heard Elyse talking about it. Elyse complained that the girls that she was assigned to dorm with during outdoor [education] were bullying her during one of her classes. I
emailed the guidance counselor and asked for her assistance with the matter, and asked if Elyse could be reassigned to a cabin with girls she felt safe with. The school principal called me and told me that she met with the girls and that they did not have any problems. Elyse came home from school [feeling] hysterical that I had meddled [in the situation]. She was very upset. She said the principal called her and the lead bullying girl into the office and that she did not feel safe to raise her concerns. I offered to take Elyse to NYC (New York City) to see plays in lieu of outdoor [education]. She refused—saying that she had just as much a right to attend as everyone else [did]. I came along. When we arrived, everyone had moved all beds as far away from two beds as they could. The girls were rude to Elyse. I did the best I could to support her. She finally agreed to leave a little early. She was very brave.

Harry related how he reported another kid bullying him in choir. Harry reported incidents of cognitive and physical bullying to the coordinator, but no action happened because of the other student’s standing. He described:

This one kid... Basically, the first thing that he said to me when we discovered that we were rooming with each other, he started immediately addressing me as Jesus. ... This is all the kid will refer to me throughout the festival. Also, we were rooming together, and he was just being a prick towards me. Well, really [he harassed] the other two roommates as well. ... He would throw stuff. ... At one point, he called [me and a friend] both gay, and then he gave us reasons why. It came to a head on the Thursday night. My friend of mine
was just like, "OK, you have to report this now because you’re not going to get the chance tomorrow.” My faith in authority had already been destroyed pretty much at this point, but this really reinforced it. We find the main coordinator of the festival. ... We finally find this kid, and this kid's denying that he said anything. ... He weaseled his way out of it. ... This kid who was doing all this stuff to me also happened to be second chair where I was seventh [chair]. ... It was really irritating and frustrating. Whenever my directors found out that I had to put up with this, their first reaction [was] they were furious that I had to put up with this. Their [second] reaction was “Why didn't you tell us?” I tried telling the coordinator, and he let it slide. I think presumably [he did so] because he didn’t want to send this kid come because one he’s the second chair—even though another kid had already gone home because of sickness in our section. Also, [they’re] just not willing to have to send a kid home in general.

T6. Assistance from Allies to Address Cyber- and Face-to-Face Bullying

Participants described how allies would come to their aid. For instance, Conner recalled how some other kids stood up for him when kids picked on him. He shared:

These were seventh graders, and for some reason the bigger kids would always pick on the little ones. I have no idea why. But, there was this one seventh grader who would usually stick up for me. He’d tell them to leave me alone sometimes. Sometimes, he’d tell them to leave me alone.
Matthew remembered how he could tell his friends from his enemies. His real friends supported him during episodes of bullying. Matthew described:

It seems no matter how long I've been in school I've always had enemies. That's just a big thing for me. I've always had enemies. I've had friends. I've had fake friends. I would basically know who my friends are. There would be some times where I had a whole class that hated me, but I always had that one friend who would stand up for me. I would have a few [friends] that would be there for me when it was me versus the world.

Participants’ parents also described how allies of their children come to their aid when they experienced cyberbullying and other online harassment. Felipe’s mother described how others often stood up for her son online. She shared: “[Felipe] answered the mean messages, but [he] mostly relied on others/friends who saw the message and censored the sender and posted rebuttal/nice comments about my son.” Elyse’s mother similarly recalled an example of how peers stuck up for her daughter when she experienced an episode of online harassment during the 2012 President election. She described:

This is a general inexact recollection: [Elyse experienced] Facebook bullying just before the 2012 national elections. A classmate of Elyse’s endorsed Romney [for President]. Elyse said, “How could you endorse that man? He wants to withdraw funding for PBS, FEMA, Public Libraries”... Elyse added that she believed that public libraries saved
her life. [Her] classmate’s response [teased]: “You are socially stupid.”

Elyse’s response [retorted back]: “Well, I have Asperger’s. And I’m doing pretty good.” ... Elyse’s other classmates’ responses [exclaimed]: “Stop bullying Elyse. We love her. She is an awesome person. We agree with Elyse’s politics.” Then her classmates printed out the [Facebook] interaction, and [they] took it to the school’s director.

Summary

The chapter presents findings from the analysis of this study’s qualitative and quantitative data. Data from this study’s interviews and surveys facilitated the development of aggregate and individualized attributes to describe participants. The data analysis also supported the development of recurring themes that describe patterns in the qualitative data. These five themes appear below in Table 4-8:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Name</th>
<th>Short Description</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1. Bullying Shapes Autistic Youths’ Experiences, Emotions, and Perceptions</td>
<td>Experiences with bullying victimization deeply affected participants’ emotions, particularly in the case of physical attacks and bullying involving their focused interests</td>
<td>RQ1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2. Face-to-Face Bullying Exerts Greater Physical Control</td>
<td>Face-to-Face bullying carries a greater connection with physical activities of daily living</td>
<td>RQ1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3. Ignoring/Walking Away from Cyber- and Face-to-Face Bullying: A Defensive Strategy</td>
<td>Participants adopted this as their main strategy to deal with bullying. They sought to ignore bullying, avoid it, and walk away from it when possible.</td>
<td>RQ2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4. Parental Monitoring Deters Cyberbullying</td>
<td>Parents adopted monitoring strategies and technology blocking to decrease the risk of online problems, including cyberbullying</td>
<td>RQ2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5. Social-Cultural Barriers Can Hinder Reporting Bullying</td>
<td>Socio-cultural barriers (e.g., bullies lying) hindered meaningful responses to reporting bullying and deterred reporting bullying</td>
<td>RQ3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T6. Assistance from to Address Cyber- and Face-to-Face Bullying</td>
<td>Friends and other allies aided participants when they experienced episodes of bullying</td>
<td>RQ2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5: Discussion


Discussion

Overview

This dissertation study investigated cyber- and face-to-face bullying among autistic youth (aged 13-18). The study aimed to learn how bullying can affect their perspectives and experiences. Additionally, the inquiry aimed to learn more about how autistic youth address bullying and report it to parents, teachers, and other authorities. This pursuit reflected a stated goal to contribute to the research base on bullying and fill in existing gaps. This dissertation also aimed to contribute knowledge to inform practice and policy on cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth.

This chapter builds upon the descriptions of findings reported in chapter 4. The discussion first examines and interprets the meaning of the findings of this study. This analysis examines each of the six themes identified in chapter four in turn. These six themes include:

T1. Bullying Shapes Autistic Youths’ Experiences, Emotions, and Perceptions

T2. Face-to-Face Bullying Exerts Greater Physical Control

T3. Ignoring/Walking Away from Cyber- and F2F Bullying as a Defensive Strategy

T4. Parental Monitoring Deters Cyberbullying

T5. Social-Cultural Barriers Can Hinder Reporting Bullying

T6. Assistance from Allies Helping Youth Address F2F and Cyberbullying

This fifth chapter also examines the role of reflexivity in the research, practical and research implications, and limitations of the study.
Examination of Each Theme (RQ 1-3)

T1. Bullying Shapes Autistic Youths’ Experiences, Emotions, and Perceptions

Guided by Research Question One, this study sought to explore how cyber- and face-to-face bullying shaped participants’ experiences, perspectives, and feelings. The findings described in Chapter 4 illustrate how bullying influenced these areas of participants’ lives. Expressing powerfully the impact of bullying on their lives, participants described a wide range of strong emotions. These powerful emotions spanned anger, resentment, and frustration. For instance, one participant expressed particular resentment about cyberbullying he experienced in a videogame in which a cyberbully killed off his characters in Minecraft. Venting his frustration, he labeled the cyberbully who killed off characters on his world a “douchebag”.

Sharing their perspectives, participants described their views on how bullying, particularly face-to-face bullying, affected their life experiences in school. They recurrently experienced bullying on school buses, which served as a main form of transportation to school. Participants shared instances of both theft of physical property and physical assaults while riding the school bus. In some cases, the culmination of these incidents involving bullying on the school bus led their parents to elect to drive participants to school. Although this potentially inconvenienced the parents, they perhaps felt like they had no other good options considering the circumstances. Participants also described their perspectives on how bullying obstructed their ability to participate in school curricular and extracurricular activities. For instance, one participant related how bullying caused him to have difficulty participating in choir.
In addition to school experiences, participants related how bullying shaped their engagement in their focused interests. As described in Chapters 1-2 and 4, focused interests carry particularly deep meaning for autistic youth who face difficulties connecting socially. Focused interests therein serve often as a principal source of certainty and help decrease anxiety. Thus, it seems very logical that participants expressed considerable frustration at bullying that hindered engagement in their focused interests. For instance, one participant described how his deep frustration with bullying at his carnival job nearly led him to quit his job three times. Yet, he also felt compelled to stay because of an enjoyment in the work.

_T2. F2F Bullying Exerts Greater Physical Control than Cyberbullying_

This study found that face-to-face bullying had a greater connection to the physical daily lives of participants than cyberbullying did. Face-to-face bullying involved disruptions of participants’ ability to travel on the school bus and engage in classroom activities. Additionally, face-to-face bullying facilitated disruption of participants’ abilities to participate in meaningful real-life activities involving their focused interests.

For instance, one participant described how he nearly made a decision to quick his job at a carnival because of face-to-face bullying. This particular participant shared how his deep interest in carnivals has formed a major part of his life experience. He also experienced face-to-face bullying related to his focused interest in magic. Similar to his interest in carnivals, his connection to magic might shape his future career pursuits. This situation illustrates how bullying during face-
to-face activities can considerably hinder development of a high quality of life. In this specific case, bullying caused some obstruction of interests related to career development, a major component of quality of life.

In contrast, cyberbullying of victims did not have a direct connection to their physical activities of life. This situation may reflect limitations of the nature of cyberbullying. Information technology available today represents a major evolution from what society had available decades ago. Yet, technology has not sufficiently matured to enable direct connections to the real world. A person today cannot steal physical property of someone by sending a text message or email. Likewise, someone today cannot kick, punch, or spit on someone through Internet-based or mobile communication. Internet-based and mobile communications today do not have access to the sensory experiences afforded by touch, taste, and smell.

T3. Ignoring/Walking Away From Bullying as a Defensive Strategy

As described in Chapter 4, participants made extensive use of a strategy of ignore/walk away to handle bullying. They sought to ignore bullying, avoid it, or walk away from it when possible. Reinforcing participants’ use of this strategy, their parents or teachers emphasized that they handled bullying in this manner. When participants did so, they at times found it difficult in practice to ignore or avoid bullying in the heat of the moment.

Collectively, this finding represented a significant divergence from what the researcher anticipated before the study based upon the practice literature. Existing books by experts on bullying of autistic youth outline intricate strategies for autistic
youth to handle bullying. Many of these strategies contain a basis in broader understanding from best practices to handle bullying. For instance, the strategies describe specific ways to communicate verbally with a bully. Other strategies in the literature reflect autism-specific considerations, such as managing difficulties with nonverbal communication that increase likelihood of bullying. Yet, participants and their parents did not generally comment about these types of strategies in the interviews or on the surveys.

Participants’ use of ignoring bullying as a strategy may seem counterintuitive. Bullies exert strong power dominances as explained in the conceptual framework of bullying in Chapter 1. To ignore bullies may only serve to enrage them and drive them further into targeting victims. As described in the Social Ecological Model of Bullying in Chapter 2, bullies often possess strong interpersonal skills concerning social relationships. Bullies’ skillsets therein can enable them to process the meaning of individuals’ ignoring them and respond accordingly.

Reflecting on these considerations, several reasons potentially help to explain this finding of participants ignoring bullying extensively. First, participants in this study’s sample and their parents and teachers might lack access to books on bullying of autistic youth. Published in the last several years, these books have widespread availability in online and physical bookstores. Yet, many autistic youth and the adults who support them do not have recognition of the existence of these texts. In other cases, the cost of the books might represent an impractical hardship for families without the financial means to purchase them.
Second, the policies of participants’ schools might limit access to emerging best practices to address bullying. The prototype Social-Ecological Model of Bullying developed for this study contains school policies as one of its explanatory factors for bullying. Policies that limit access by students, parents, and teachers to ways to empower youth can shape the presence of bullying in schools and communities. In some cases, a non-existent policy for how to teach youth to address bullying might have the same effect as a limited policy.

Third, some parents might believe strongly in ignoring/walking away from bullying as the key way to handle it. A subset of participants’ parents expressed how they had explicitly taught their children this strategy. In one case, a parent rested reasoning on this approach to handle bullying with the family’s religious beliefs.

T4. Parental Monitoring Deters Cyberbullying

As discussed in Chapter 2, the literature evidences that parents who actively monitor their children’s online activities and online safety reduce the risk for cyberbullying. In contrast, children who lack observation of their online activities by their parents face a heightened risk for cyberbullying. Participants of this dissertation study frequently experienced active parental monitoring of their online activities. A subset of the parents discussed intricate, multifaceted strategies for how they approached monitoring of their children’s online activities. For instance, one parent described a checklist of questions that she routinely asked her son.

Additionally, the parents of participants frequently put in place blocks that restricted their children’s online activities. In some cases, parents put in place
electronic locks that restricted their children’s use of certain devices for certain purposes (ex. text messaging). In other cases, parents established norms for the family household in which they required use of a device in certain geographic spaces. This type of rule facilitated direct parental direct observation of the screens on their children’s devices.

Collectively, the combination of blocks and active parental monitoring strategies likely reduced participants’ risk of cyberbullying. Participants, for instance, could not experience cyberbullying via texting if they lacked access to text message via a cellphone. Likewise, they might not experience recurring cyberbullying via a networked gaming system when their parents actively monitored their screen activity. Parents would likely spot occurrences of cyberbullying as these instances happened.

T5. Fear of Negative Consequences Can Hinder Reporting Bullying

The Socio-Ecological Model of Bullying outlined in Chapter 2 presents organizational policies as major factor in bullying. Schools’ willingness to take seriously reports of bullying and address these incidents in a practical manner represents one critical area of these policies. Participants frequently described how their school or associated enrichment activity (e.g., choir) did not take their report of bullying seriously. At times, authorities disregarded reports of bullying by showing greater trust of the bullies’ accounts than the victims’ accounts. Lacking objective evidence that bullying had indeed occurred, participants faced a battle of competing stories. Therein, they attained undesirable outcomes for their effort
made to report bullying to authorities. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, this adverse situation might make participants less likely to report bullying to authorities in the future. The literature indicates a decreased likelihood for youth to report bullying when they believe that authorities will not take their reports seriously.

The findings for this theme raise specific implications concerning school districts in light of the Dept. of Education (ED)’s letter on bullying of students with disabilities. As discussed in Chapter 1, ED sent this letter to U.S. school districts to remind them of obligations to address bullying of students with disabilities. To take seriously first-hand reports of bullying of students with disabilities represents a critical component of approaches to address bullying.

**T6. Assistance from Allies Helping Youth Address F2F and Cyberbullying**

Participants had allies who helped them handle bullying as it occurred. These allies supported participants as they dealt with instances of both cyber- and face-to-face bullying. For instance, one participant experienced an incident of cyberbullying on Facebook involving her perspectives on the 2012 Presidential Race. Several of her classmates came to her aid to report comments that cyberbullied her to a teacher. These classmates served in effect as impromptu allies in that they on the spot helped her out when they saw her in need of assistance. Other allies served as more long-term sources of support.

Overall, this notion of participants’ allies to stand up for them when bullying occurred reflects the social cognition aspect of the Social-Ecological Model of
Bullying described in Chapter 2. Bullies, who possess strong interpersonal skills themselves, tend to prey more readily upon individuals who lack strong social supports. Thus, allies play an even greater role to stand up for autistic youth considering challenges with socialization associated with their disability.

**Review of General Findings**

*Communication/Social Skills*

As discussed in Chapter 4, the parents of participants in this study reported that their children experienced some challenges with communication or socialization. According to the parents, participants met with their peers outside of school for a median of .5 days per week. Nearly half of parents indicated that their children did not meet with friends outside of school during an average week. This lack of routine social activities with friends and other peers outside of school potentially reflected difficulties with development and management of friendships.

These difficulties with socialization and social relationships might have affected the kind of information that participants shared during the interviews. Participants’ socialization and communication difficulties might also have hampered rapport between the researcher and the participants. These challenges might then have influenced participants’ descriptions of bullying and their recall of bullying incidents.
Expression of Emotions and Feelings

As described in Chapters 1 and 2, autistic people commonly have difficulty processing and expressing their emotions and feelings. For this study, participants met the researcher for the first time at the beginning of the interviews. Participants might have felt social anxiety from this novel situation that could have affected the information they shared during the interviews.

Particularly, this state of anxiety might have shaped how participants recalled memories of cyber- and face-to-face bullying. Additionally, participants’ feelings of anxiety might have affected their articulation of perspectives and feelings associated with memories of bullying. During the interview, the researcher made efforts to ease participants’ anxiety. He reassured them that they could take their time to complete their thoughts and describe their recollections of experiences with bullying.

Questioning during the Interviews with Autistic Youth

Developing this study, no best practice guidelines existed for how to interview autistic youth for a research study. Thus, the research constructed the interview question template based upon feedback from other researchers and key stakeholders. The process to conduct the study’s interviews with this template served as a key source of learning for the researcher. Through reflection on what transpired during the interviews, he gained an intricate understanding of potential pitfalls and problems that can occur. Some of these challenges reflect the disability human experience of autism. This insight will support the development of a set of
best practice guidelines to interview autistic youth for future studies. Additionally, insight gained from this study will also assist the development of guidelines for how to interview autistic youth in other settings.

**Analysis of Technological Design Considerations for the Findings (RQ4)**

The fourth research question for this dissertation study involved technological considerations of the dissertation and its collected data. These technological considerations concerned the design and development of a new educational software system. Tentatively named Schuyler, this software system will seek to teach autistic youth strategies for how to address bullying as it occurs. Additionally, Schuyler will help autistic youth to report instances of bullying to parents, teachers, and other authorities.

The discussion in this section first outlines implications of each theme for the design and development of Schuyler. Then, the discussion examines the potential game-based framework for this software and its role to teach bullies empathy. Finally, this section examines a potential component to the Schuyler that can help victims to report instances of bullying to parents, teachers, and other authorities.

**Ignoring/Walking Away From Bullying as a Defensive Strategy**

The theme of *Ignoring Bullying as a Defensive Strategy* illustrates a potential starting point for youths’ present strategies to handle bullying. Some prospective users of Schuyler might have learned to ignore, avoid, or walk away from bullying as a main strategy. Therein, these youths’ background might match that of participants from
this study. Additionally, these prospective users might also face varying success with the use of such a strategy as participants of this study did.

Yet, other users of Schuyler might possess a more varied toolkit of strategies. In some cases, their personal toolkit of strategies might incorporate a strategy similar to ignore/walk away but go beyond it. In other cases, youth might not use this strategy at all unlike participants of this study.

Thus, the software system for Schuyler should flexibly adapt to the user’s base point for their use of strategies to handle bullying. Facilitating this process, Schuyler should aim to identify what strategies users presently use, and under what circumstances. Importantly, the software should ascertain youths’ success with their existing strategies to deal with bullying. Additionally, Schuyler should also determine how youth came to learn these strategies. Youth whose parents and teachers reinforce ignore/walk away as the singular way to handle bullying might find it difficult to go beyond this approach.

_Fear of Negative Consequences to Report Bullying_

Likewise, the theme of _Fear of Negative Consequences to Report Bullying_ carries major implications for how to scaffold incident reporting in Schuyler. The barriers to reporting bullying shared by participants may reflect similar concerns of potential users of Schuyler. Users of the Schuyler might not report bullying if they feel such reports may not result in corresponding action. They may feel even more wary if reason exists to believe such reports could put them in trouble.

Thus, Schuyler would need to help potential users feel comfortable to report
bullying instances. A few different potential approaches could help accomplish this. Yet, ultimately the willingness of users to report bullying might depend intrinsically on the bullying policies of schools they attend.

**Assistance from Allies Helping Youth Address F2F and Cyberbullying**

The role of allies to help autistic youth stand up against bullying also has implications for development of Schuyler. As described in Chapter 2, allies play a pivotal role to address instances of cyber- and face-to-face bullying. Socialization difficulties experienced by autistic youth both put them at greater risk for bullying and make it harder for them to attain allies against bullying. Yet, some participants of this study did achieve friendships with peers who stood up for them to help them handle bullying. The software system in Schuyler can teach autistic youth about the role of allies to handle bullying and about social skills involved in development of friends who act as allies.

**Design Implications for a Role Playing Game-Based Framework for Schuyler**

Autistic youth who use Schuyler will need to learn about how to address bullying in a friendly, motivating environment. Recognizing this consideration, Schuyler could potentially adopt a game-based framework similar to a role playing game with interactive scenarios. Users of Schuyler would learn recommended strategies from the literature on bullying (e.g., assertiveness, confident communication and body language, etc.) while having fun. The scenarios in Schuyler might also integrate general instruction in interpersonal skills, which can empower autistic youth
against marginalization. For instance, an adaptation of Social Stories, a widespread way to teach social skills to autistic youth, could support learning of social toolkits of practiced phrases to say to bullies. (One example of a practiced phrased for youth to use in many situations is: “That’s bullying! I do not want to be treated that way.”

*Design Implications for Interventions to Teach Bullies Empathy in Schuyler*

This study expanded knowledge about how bullying affects autistic youth and how they address and report it. These findings inform efforts to intervene with bullies to improve their empathy for how bullying affects the autistic youth whom they target. Specifically, the new information presents implications for how an add-on to Schuyler can help accomplish this goal. Bullies could interact in virtual scenarios that present social life experiences in victimization from the point of view of their past victims. This could enhance the bullies’ ability to take the perspective of their victims and understand better the psychological or physical harm they cause.

*Facilitating Reporting of Bullying Instances to Authorities*

Another potential add-on for Schuyler might facilitate reporting of bullying instances by autistic youth to authorities. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, autistic youth frequently experience challenges in communication and socialization that can hamper reporting bullying to authorities. Schuyler could help scaffold the process to report an instance of bullying to authorities through two complementary ways. First, the software could explain in concrete terms what it means to report bullying, reasons for doing so, and steps involved. Students would learn about
reporting bullying in a manner that fits their learning style and breaks down the complexity involved into discrete steps. Second, this add-on to Schuyler could enable students potentially to file anonymous or identified reports of bullying directly with their schools.

**Use of Reflexivity to Facilitate the Study**

The process of reflexivity shaped the researcher’s activities throughout this dissertation study of bullying of autistic youth. During the study’s interviews, the researcher generated extensive field notes to document important considerations for later data analysis. The researcher also made field notes after the interviews concluded. Throughout the course of the study, the researcher reflected heavily on those notes and on the process to conduct this project. Engaging in this self-reflection, the researcher sought to make sense of the meaning behind phenomena that sharply deviated from prior expectations. The researcher also sought to reconcile differences between findings uncovered in this study and what the academic and professional literature state. This engagement in self-reflection relied heavily on the researcher’s own experiences with bullying.

One major instance of an unexpected finding involved how extensively participants and their parents emphasized ignoring bullying as a strategy. Coming into this study, the researcher did not expect that a significantly large subset of participants would identify ignoring bullying as a main defensive strategy. The researcher anticipated that many participants would describe intricate strategies to deal with bullying (e.g., those found in practitioner literature). Yet, the researcher
did not find these a priori beliefs to hold true for the study's participants.

Participants and their parents predominantly emphasized ignoring bullying as the major defensive strategy. They infrequently articulated elaborate strategies to handle cyber- and face-to-face bullying.

Reflexivity also helped to identify and make sense of major limitations of this study. Particularly, extensive engagement in reflexivity enhanced the researcher's understanding of limitations in descriptions of bullying experiences articulated by participants. Although participants shared rich comments about their experiences dealing with bullying, they had difficulty at times sharing in-depth details. In some cases, this challenge likely reflected blocked memories of experiences with bullying. The researcher's experience with bullying victimization helped to build empathy with participants’ blocked memories of bullying.

**Limitations of This Dissertation Study**

This study presents several major limitations concerning the interviews with autistic youth and the youth and parental surveys. The sections below describe in detail how these limitations potentially affected the study and its findings.

*Challenges of the Disability Experience of Autism*

Disability challenges experienced by the participants led to a major constraint for the study. Recognizing the nature of autism, all participants experienced challenges with communication and social interaction. These challenges made it more difficult for participants to converse and share their bullying experiences with the
researcher. In some cases, participants’ vivid recollections of memories of bullying experiences exacerbated this situation.

At times, participants elected not to share certain memories or details about uncomfortable or distressing experiences. Thus, this study likely contains an under-representation of participants’ bullying experiences. Additionally, unshared experiences might have influenced the qualitative analysis of data for the study. These experiences might have informed insight into important patterns common to participants to guide the development of themes and factors.

Racial/Ethnicity Backgrounds of Participants

The lack of racial and ethnic diversity of participants in this study represents another major limitation of this study. The diversity range of participants’ race/ethnicity does not match that seen in the U.S. as a whole. Two factors likely accounted for this situation.

Significant racial/ethnicity disparities exist in the clinical diagnosis of autism. Autistic Caucasian children are more likely to receive an accurate clinical diagnosis of autism than autistic children from racial/ethnic minority groups. When children from racial/ethnic minority groups do receive a clinical diagnosis of autism, this diagnosis occurs later on average than for Caucasian children (Mandell, Wiggins, Carpenter, Daniels, DiGuiseppi, Durkin, et al., 2009; Kogan, Blumberg, Schieve, Boyle, Perrin, Ghandour, et. al, 2009; Jarquin, Wiggins, Schieve, & Van Naarden-Braun, 2011).
Gender Disparity of Participants

The gender disparity of the sample population also may have affected the findings of this study. Male youth accounted for the vast majority of participants in this study. This situation might reflect the gender disparity among autistic youth. More male individuals have a clinical diagnosis of autism than female individuals (Dworzynski, Ronald, Bolton, & Happé, 2012; Kreiser & White, 2013).

Diagnoses of Co-Occurring Disabilities

The co-occurring diagnoses of participants might have influenced the findings of this study. Autistic youth and adults commonly receive diagnoses of co-occurring neurological disabilities (e.g., ADHD, OCD) and chronic health conditions. The profiles of the participants in this study fit that trend as most participants had received diagnoses of at least two co-occurring conditions. These co-occurring conditions might have affected how participants experienced, addressed, and reported instances of cyber- and face-to-face bullying.

Educational Placement of Participants

The findings from this study might reflect an overrepresentation of autistic students with fully or mostly inclusive educational placements in K-12. The vast majority of study participants (92%) had a fully or mostly inclusive education placement. Their enrollment in general education classes represented the majority (51% or higher) of their course load. Additionally, their enrollment in special education classes (49% or lower) represented the minority of their course load.
The literature does indicate that students with disabilities in general education classes might experience a higher risk of bullying. Thus, the sample in this study likely represented an important group to share insightful perspectives and beliefs about how bullying affects them. Yet, this group does not sufficiently reflect the perspectives and beliefs of autistic students who spend most of their school days in special education classes.

*Geographic and Cultural Differences*

Geographic and cultural differences represent another important consideration for this dissertation study. The study conducted interviews and surveys in three geographic regions, including two areas in the North and one in the Southeast. To gather data in different areas likely enhanced the capability of this study to capture a diversity of perspectives and beliefs on bullying. Yet, at the same time these regional differences may limit the internal consistency of this study.

Particularly, perspectives and beliefs of participants and their parents might differ for those from a Southern state when compared with a Northeastern state. These regions contain major cultural differences that shape the lives of their residents. This meant that the perspectives of participants from Mississippi might have reflected cultural differences that distinguished them from participants in Pennsylvania and Maryland/Washington D.C. In a couple of cases, participants from Mississippi expressed some reluctance to describe the negative impact of bullying. One of these individuals asserted his belief in the goodness of all people and how
others had emphasized this to him.

*Researcher's Connection to Autism*

The researcher of this study investigating cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth is autistic himself. His in-depth knowledge of the human experience of autism facilitated reflexivity for this study. However, his personal connection to autism might also have affected this study's findings. To reduce the impact of any potential bias the researcher connected extensively with researchers and professionals knowledgeable about autism. Their ongoing guidance enhanced the study's investigation.

*Contributions to the Research Literature*

This dissertation represents the first study in the U.S. to conduct semi-structured interviews with autistic youth to study their bullying experiences. Past studies in the U.S. only investigated bullying of autistic youth through surveys with their parents. Their choice of methods likely reflects the difficulty to conduct interviews with autistic youth that stems from disability challenges. Relatively few studies in the existing literature used interviews to examine the perspectives and experiences of autistic youth for any subject matter. Future research efforts can learn from this study to conduct additional studies of bullying of autistic youth with qualitative methods.

This dissertation also represents the first study to examine whether and to whom autistic youth report bullying when they experience it. The study identified several barriers that autistic youth can experience to report bullying. Future
research studies can build upon this understanding of potential barriers to reporting bullying. For instance, studies might explore ways to reduce these barriers and facilitate reporting of instances of cyber- and face-to-face bullying. These facilitators to report bullying might involve targeted supports (e.g., software systems to report bullying) and attitude changes.

**Implications for Practice and Policymaking**

Developed from this study, the findings about bullying of autistic youth present major implications for practices and policymaking. The findings can inform how national and state policymakers develop policies that address bullying of autistic youth. Additionally, the findings can help professionals develop programs to help autistic youth learn how to address and report bullying. The sections below describe these implications.

*Face-to-Face and Cyberbullying Policies*

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, U.S. states have implemented policies to address face-to-face and cyber- bullying of youth. More recently, the U.S. Department of Education communicated with state education departments and school districts about bullying of students with disabilities. This study raises implications for how school districts and state education departments address cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth and youth with disabilities broadly. The findings inform efforts by local school districts to develop educational programs that help autistic K-12 students address and report bullying.
Online/Networked Gaming: Organizations and Systems involved

As data from the parental surveys showed, a large subset of participants (38 percent) expressed a focused interest in video gaming. One participant described cyberbullying that occurred over Minecraft, a networked gaming system. Other participants in this subset and autistic youth broadly face a risk for cyberbullying over networked gaming. This risk likely increases with the frequency of use of such networked gaming systems. This study’s findings on strategies to deal with cyberbullying, reporting instances, and perspectives on it raise implications for networked gaming systems. Particularly, the findings inform future efforts that adopt new approaches to protect at-risk autistic youth from cyberbullying on networked gaming systems.

Online Social Networking: Organizations and Systems

Likewise, a subset of participants of this study also used social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. Among individuals who did not use social networking sites, parental blocking and monitoring sometimes restricted their access. This situation might shift as these youth age into adulthood and likely enjoy more autonomy in their lives.

The free exchange of comments, photos, and the other information on social networking sites puts this study’s participants and other autistic people at risk for cyberbullying. This study presents implications for future efforts by social
networking sites to address cyberbullying of autistic youth (and potentially other youth with disabilities.)

**Suggestions for Further Research**

*Interviews with Parents of Autistic Youth and Expanded Nationwide Surveys*

The parents of participants in this study shared very meaningful qualitative comments about their children’s bullying experiences. Future research studies should build upon what this study learned from parents through these comments. Therein, these studies can conduct semi-structured interviews with parents of autistic youth to investigate bullying. Particularly, these studies might aim to focus on parents who taught their children strategies to address bullying and how to report it. Additionally, future studies can expand the survey of parents used in this study to examine the experiences of nationwide samples of parents from all 50 states in the U.S. These studies would likely make use of the Internet as a natural medium to recruit a large national, representative sample of parents of autistic youth.
Investigations of Other Contexts that Promote Bullying of Autistic Youth and Adults

This research study yielded highly meaningful findings for the context of K-12 education. Although bullying can occur frequently in this setting, bullying also exists in many other settings with rigid social structures. Additionally, bullying can occur among both youth and adults. This suggests a need to study cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic people in other contexts and throughout the life span.

For instance, future research studies can explore how autistic youth and adults experience, address, and report bullying in community settings. Research studies that investigate bullying of autistic youth in the community might focus their lens toward recreational and fitness facilities, such as youth centers. Particularly, researchers might study highly instructional programs that teach youth sports (ex. tennis) or fitness activities (ex. martial arts). Instructional programs therein that operate similar to the activities and structure of a K-12 school day might carry the highest risk for bullying of autistic people.

Seeking to understand the impact of bullying throughout the lifespan, future studies should examine activities of adult life that involve rigid structure and some authoritarian control. The workplace presents one particularly important context with these elements. Thus, future studies might investigate how autistic youth and adults handle cyber- and face-to-face bullying at the workplace. Such a study might investigate cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic people participating in paid employment and volunteer activities. Fevre, Robinson, Lewis, & Jones (2013) surveyed workplace bullying among 3,879 workers in the United Kingdom. They found that workers with disabilities reported greater ill treatment at work than
workers without disabilities. Workers with disabilities reported greater rates of physical violence, humiliations and ridicule, threats and intimidation, and social exclusion. Compared with workers identified with physical disabilities, workers identified with psychological and intellectual and developmental disabilities had greater levels of ill treatment.

This finding suggests a need for a specific investigation of cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic workers. This dissertation study's use of qualitative methodology to study cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth can help inform workplace bullying. Researchers who adopt interviews to investigate workplace bullying of autistic youth and adults can learn from how this study interviewed autistic students.

Higher education represents another important context for future studies to investigate cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic people. The structure of activities in higher education differs considerably from that of both the workplace and K-12 education.

Use of Diary Studies to Understand Bullying of Autistic Youth as It Occurs

The use of interviews with autistic youth for this study of bullying yielded meaningful, first-hand insight. Participants shared direct perspectives and beliefs about how bullying affected them. This information greatly informed knowledge of bullying of autistic youth. However, this approach did rely heavily on participants’ recall of memories about bullying during their school years. Recall of memories can sometimes miss important facts and details.
Seeking to mitigate this challenge, the use of diary methods might play an important role. Iilda, Shrout, Laurenceau, & Bolger (2012) describe how diary methods can capture events, reflections, moods, and interactions in relative near time. Future studies that adopt a diary method could ask autistic youth and their parents to maintain electronic diaries about ongoing bullying experiences. These diaries would capture ongoing information about how autistic youth and their parents deal with bullying. Diaries would also enable them to share how and to whom they report instances of bullying. Participants would also describe how circumstances underlying bullying affect their mood at different periods.

**Summary of This Chapter**

Autistic participants from this research study represent a critical group of youth who face heightened risk of cyber- and face-to-face bullying. This heightened risk stems largely from challenges they experience in communication, socialization, and other areas of life. Researchers, practitioners, and policy makers need to improve their understanding of how autistic youth experience cyber- and face-to-face bullying. They also need to learn how autistic youth differently address and report instances of cyber- and face-to-face bullying to parents, teachers, and other authorities.

Addressing this issue, this dissertation investigated cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth with mixed methods. The study conducted interviews and surveys with autistic youth and surveys with their parents. The findings from this study offer important insight into the experiences of autistic youth dealing with
bullying. This insight can inform researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. Policymakers and practitioners can particularly learn from this study’s findings to improve support systems to empower autistic youth against bullying.

This dissertation also supports future research studies that explore cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth and adults in greater depth. Research studies had previously not investigated how autistic youth handle bullying and report it to authorities. The findings of this study can assist future studies that seek to build upon this dissertation’s work.
References
References


Appendix A: Parental Informed Content Form
Informed Consent Form for Parent and Child Participation in Social Science Research
The Pennsylvania State University – Study 1

Title of Project: Online and Offline Bullying of Autistic Youth

Principal Investigator: Scott Michael Robertson, MHCl, Ph.D. Candidate
Office: IST Building, Room 307D | University Park, PA 16802
Email: srobertson@ist.psu.edu
Phone: (973) 464-6315

Advisor: Dr. Shawn Clark
Office: IST Building, Room 301E | University Park, PA 16802
Email: sclark@ist.psu.edu
Phone: (814) 865-4449

1. Purpose of the Study: This research project aims to study how bullying can affect autistic youth. Past studies suggest that many youth with disabilities can face a higher risk for bullying. This study seeks to study how bullying can affect autistic youth.

2. Procedures to be followed: This study will ask you to complete a survey about your child’s bullying experiences. This survey will take 15 to 20 minutes to complete. You may complete this survey online or on paper. While you complete this survey, your child will participate in an interview and complete a short survey. This interview will last about 30 to 60 minutes. The researcher will record the audio of this interview using a digital recorder.

3. Discomforts and Risks: Participation by you and your child in this study may lead you or your child to recall uncomfortable or bad memories about bullying. If you would like to discuss these past experiences with a counselor, please call Penn State’s Psychological Clinic. You can call them at (814) 865-2191 and ask them to refer you to a counselor. If you have any questions or concerns about bullying, please call the National Bullying Prevention Center at (888) 248-0822. If you have any questions or concerns about autism, please call the Autism NOW Center at (855) 828-8476.

4. Benefits: Participation by you and your child in this study will improve the understanding of how bullying affects autistic youth. This study will inform future work to create new software. This software aims to teach autistic youth how to address and report bullying as it occurs.

5. Statement of Confidentiality: Participation by you and your child in this study is confidential. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties. The researcher will store data from this study at Penn State’s IST Building. He will secure this data with the use of a password. Both the Office for Research Protections at Penn State and its Institutional Review Board may review all records from this study. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services may also review all of the records from this study. No documents made from this study will share any information that can identify you or your child.

The researcher will store the audio recording from the interview with your child on his office computer. To allow for review of the study he will maintain this recording for five years after the conclusion of the study. The researcher will destroy the audio recording of the interview in 2018.
6. **Right to Ask Questions:** You may talk with the researcher, Scott Michael Robertson, at any time. You can reach him by calling this phone number: (973) 464-6315. When calling Scott, you may share with him any questions, complaints, or concerns about this study. You may also call him if you feel that this study led to any harm for you or your child. Please contact Penn State’s Office for Research Protections (ORP) to share any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant. You call them at this phone number: (814) 865-1775. The ORP cannot answer any questions you have about study procedures. Please direct any of these questions to Scott.

7. **Compensation:** For your participation in this study, you will receive a gift certificate for one large pizza.

8. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You will receive a copy of this consent form for your own records.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this study.

**If your child is under 18 years of age:** Your child must receive permission from you to take part in this study. By signing this form, you consent for you and your child to participate in this study. You also grant permission to record the audio of your child’s interview with the researcher. After receiving your consent for your child to participate, the researcher will also ask for your child’s own assent.

**If your child is aged 18 years or older:** Your child grants consent to take part in this study by signing a separate form. Your child’s signature on this form also grants permission for audio recording of the interview with the researcher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent’s Name (printed)</th>
<th>Parental Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s First Name</th>
<th>Child’s Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person Obtaining Consent</th>
<th>Signature of Person Obtaining Consent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix B: Youth Informed Assent Form
Assent Form for Child Participation in Social Science Research
The Pennsylvania State University – Study 1

Title of Project: Online and Offline Bullying of Autistic Youth

Principal Investigator: Scott Michael Robertson, MHCI, Ph.D. Candidate
Office: IST Building Room, 307D | University Park, PA 16802
Email: srobertson@ist.psu.edu
Phone: (973) 464-6315

Advisor: Dr. Shawn Clark
Office: IST Building Room, 301E | University Park, PA 16802
Email: sclark@ist.psu.edu
Phone: (814) 865-4449

This form requests your voluntary participation in a research study. This form contains some important information about what you can expect from your participation in this study.

If you are under 18 years of age, you must first receive your parent’s consent to participate.

Your parents and others can help you to read through this form. They can help you to understand what this form says.

1. **What will happen to me in the study?** This research study seeks to learn about how bullying affects autistic youth. This study will ask you to participate in an interview and to complete a short survey. This interview will last about 30 to 60 minutes. During the interview, the researcher will ask you some questions about your past bullying experiences. The researcher will use a digital recorder to record audio of this interview. Both your participation in the interview and your completion of the survey represent voluntary activities for you. You may choose not to participate in the interview or survey.

2. **Can anything bad happen to me?** To answer these interview questions may lead you to recall bad memories about bullying by your peers and others. These bad memories may feel upsetting for you to recall and to discuss with others.

3. **Can anything good happen to me?** To answer the questions during this interview will support this research project on bullying of autistic youth. This project seeks to learn more about bullying of autistic youth. The researcher aims to create new software to help autistic youth to address and report bullying.

4. **Will anyone know I am in the study?** This study will keep your participation a secret. The researcher will use a password to secure your identity and all of your study information. He will store this information securely on an office computer at Penn State University’s IST Building. Both the Office for Research Protections at Penn State and its Institutional Review Board may review all records from this study. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services may also review all of the records from this study. No documents made from this study will share any information that can identify you.

Only the researcher will have access to this audio recording of your interview. The researcher will store this audio recording of the interview with you on his office computer. To allow for review of the study he will maintain the recording for five years after the conclusion of the study. The researcher will destroy the recording in 2018.

5. **Who can I talk to about the study?** You can talk about this study with the study researcher, Scott Michael Robertson. Your parents and other adults can help you talk about this study. Scott Michael Robertson can be reached at IST Building Room, 307D | University Park, PA 16802. Scott Michael Robertson can be reached at srobertson@ist.psu.edu. He can be reached at (973) 464-6315.

The researcher, Scott Michael Robertson, MHCI, Ph.D. Candidate, Office: IST Building Room, 307D | University Park, PA 16802. Scott Michael Robertson can also be reached at srobertson@ist.psu.edu. He can be reached at (973) 464-6315.

If you have any questions about this study, you can call Scott Michael Robertson at (973) 464-6315. Scott Michael Robertson can also be reached at srobertson@ist.psu.edu.

The researcher, Scott Michael Robertson, MHCI, Ph.D. Candidate, Office: IST Building Room, 307D | University Park, PA 16802. Scott Michael Robertson can also be reached at srobertson@ist.psu.edu. He can be reached at (973) 464-6315.

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The researchers, Scott Michael Robertson, MHCI, Ph.D. Candidate, Office: IST Building Room, 307D | University Park, PA 16802. Scott Michael Robertson can also be reached at srobertson@ist.psu.edu. He can be reached at (973) 464-6315.
Robertson. You can call Scott at this phone number: (973) 464-6315. When talking to Scott, you can share with him any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study.

6. What if I do not want to do this? Your decision to answer the questions during the interview and to answer the survey represents a voluntary activity. You may choose not to participate in the interview or complete the survey without feeling concerned or afraid. You may skip questions. You may also ask the researcher to stop the interview.

You must be 18 years of age or have signed permission from your parents to take part in this study.

If you are under 18 years of age: Your parent must first consent to your participation in this study and the audio recording of your interview with the researcher. You may then provide your own assent to participate by signing this form. Your parent will receive a copy of this form.

If you are 18 years of age or older: You may consent to participate in this study by signing this form. Your consent grants permission for audio recording of the researcher's interview with you. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

For your participation in this study, the researcher will provide one gift certification for a large pizza to your parent.

If you agree to take part in this study, please complete the information below:

My Full Name (printed)  My Age

My Signature  Date

My Parent’s Name (printed)

Person Obtaining Assent  Signature of Person Obtaining Assent
Appendix C. Study Recruitment Message
Study on Online and Offline Bullying of Autistic Youth

I seek participation by parents of autistic youth and their children for a new research study on bullying experiences. I conduct this study for my thesis research in the College of Information Sciences and Technology at Penn State University.

This study will ask your child to participate in an interview about experiences with cyberbullying and face-to-face bullying by same-age peers. While your child participates in an interview with me, you will complete a survey about your child’s bullying experiences. For your participation in this study, you will receive a gift certificate for a free large pizza from Papa John’s Pizza.

For more information about this study or to inquire about participation, please contact me:

Scott Michael Robertson, MHCI, Ph.D. Candidate (ABD)
The College of Information Sciences and Technology
Penn State University
Email: srobertson@ist.psu.edu
Phone: (973) 464-6315
Appendix D. Interview Script (Interviews w/ Participants)
Online and Offline Bullying of Autistic Youth

Script for Semi-Structured Interviews with Autistic Youths about their Face-to-Face and Cyber Bullying Experiences

Thank you for your participation in this interview about your bullying experiences.

* I will ask you to complete a short survey about your bullying experiences. Please answer this survey as well as you can. The survey does not have correct or right answers.

* Next, we will have a conversation about your experiences with bullying. I will ask you some questions during this conversation to guide our conversation. Please answer the questions with as much specific detail as you can recall.

* What does bullying mean to you? What do you think of when you hear the word bullying?

* What does cyberbullying mean to you? What do you think of when you hear the word cyberbullying?

* Have you learned ways to address bullying from others?
  * Which persons taught you to address bullying and when did they?
  * Share with me what they taught you to do when peers bully you.

* Tell me about your experiences with peers bullying you in face-to-face situations at your school or somewhere else.
  
  • Where did the bullying take place? Did you see or hear other persons nearby (ex. bystanders, friends of the bully, etc.)?
  • How did you feel about yourself during the bullying?
  • How did you handle the bullying?
  • Did you report the bullying to your parents, teachers, etc.? If so, how did they respond? If not, what reasons did you feel for not reporting the bullying?

* Tell me about your experiences when peers cyberbullied you during online activities. These online activities could have involved texting, instant messaging, use of an online forum, or some other online communication.
  
  • What form of communication did the cyberbullying involve (ex. IM, texting)?
  • How did you feel about yourself during the cyberbullying?
  • How did you handle the cyberbullying?
• Did you report the cyberbullying to your parents, teachers, etc.? If so, how did they respond? If not, what reasons did you feel for not reporting the bullying?

Thank you for your participation in this interview. Do you have any additional information about your experiences with bullying that you would like to add?
Appendix E. Survey with Participants’ Parents
Online and Offline Bullying of Autistic Youth: Survey of Parents of Bullied Youth

I. Educational and Diagnostic Background Information

My child’s age: _______ My child’s sex: □ M □ F □ My child’s grade level: _______

My child identifies ethnically as: (Please check all that apply.)
□ Asian □ Hispanic/Latino □ Black/African-American □ White □ American Indian or Alaskan Native □ Other ________________________________

My child speaks English as a second language: □ Yes □ No

My child’s most passionate interests include: ____________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

My child’s favorite school subjects include: ________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

This percent of my child’s classes are in general education:
□ 0-25 Percent □ 26-50 Percent □ 51-75 Percent □ 76-100 Percent

Compared with same-age peers, my child receives grades at school described as:
□ Very Above Average □ Above Average □ Average □ Below Average

My child uses this augmentative/alternative communication (check all that apply):
□ Sign Language □ Letter Board □ Typing Device □ Pictures □ Other____________________

My child has this comfort with conversation skills when interacting with peers:
□ Does not usually converse □ Lots of trouble □ Little trouble □ No trouble

My child has this comfort with social skills when interacting with peers:
□ Does not usually socialize □ Lots of trouble □ Little trouble □ No trouble

On average, my child gets together with friends for this many days per week:
□ 0 Days □ 1 Day □ 2 Days □ 3 Days □ 4 Days □ 5 Days □ 6 Days □ 7 Days
My child lives in an area that is:  □ Urban  □ Suburban  □ Rural

My child lives in this county and state: ___________________________  ____________

My child received a clinical diagnosis of *autism spectrum disorder* or a diagnosis on the autism spectrum (e.g., autistic disorder, Asperger’s Syndrome, or PDD-NOS) from a clinician (e.g., a psychologist, psychiatrist, neurologist, etc.):  □ Yes  □ No

My child first received this clinical diagnosis of autism in this year: __________________

A clinician diagnosed my child with *neurological disabilities or conditions other than autism* (e.g., ADHD, learning disabilities, OCD, etc.):  □ Yes  □ No

If you answered yes, please check all neurological diagnose(s) your child received:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>☐ ADD/ADHD</th>
<th>☐ Anxiety</th>
<th>☐ Depression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Dyslexia</td>
<td>□ Epilepsy</td>
<td>□ Intellectual Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Learning Disabilities</td>
<td>□ OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder)</td>
<td>□ PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Tourette Syndrome or Tic Disorder</td>
<td>□ Other (fill in below): ___________________________</td>
<td>□ Other (fill in below): ___________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A doctor or clinician diagnosed my child with *chronic health conditions or disabilities* (e.g., allergies, asthma, diabetes, etc.):  □ Yes  □ No

If you answered yes, please check all diagnose(s) your child received:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>☐ Allergies</th>
<th>☐ Asthma</th>
<th>☐ Anemia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Blindness or Visual Impairment</td>
<td>□ Deafness or Hearing Loss</td>
<td>□ Diabetes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Hyperopia (Farsightedness)</td>
<td>□ Irritable Bowel Syndrome</td>
<td>□ Myopia (Nearsightedness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Sleep condition: ___________________________</td>
<td>□ Other (fill in below): ___________________________</td>
<td>□ Other (fill in below): ___________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. Technology Background Information

My child engages in the following online activities: (Please check all activities that apply and indicate the frequency for each activity checked.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online Activity</th>
<th>Number of Hours Per Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Browses websites</td>
<td>☐ 1 hrs. ☐ 2 hrs. ☐ 3 hrs. ☐ 4 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 5 hrs. ☐ 6 hrs. ☐ 7 hrs. ☐ 8+ hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses email to send/receive messages</td>
<td>☐ 1 hrs. ☐ 2 hrs. ☐ 3 hrs. ☐ 4 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 5 hrs. ☐ 6 hrs. ☐ 7 hrs. ☐ 8+ hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses text messaging to send/receive messages</td>
<td>☐ 1 hrs. ☐ 2 hrs. ☐ 3 hrs. ☐ 4 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 5 hrs. ☐ 6 hrs. ☐ 7 hrs. ☐ 8+ hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses instant messaging to send/receive messaging (i.e., using AIM, Google, etc.)</td>
<td>☐ 1 hrs. ☐ 2 hrs. ☐ 3 hrs. ☐ 4 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 5 hrs. ☐ 6 hrs. ☐ 7 hrs. ☐ 8+ hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Google+, Twitter, etc.)</td>
<td>☐ 1 hrs. ☐ 2 hrs. ☐ 3 hrs. ☐ 4 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 5 hrs. ☐ 6 hrs. ☐ 7 hrs. ☐ 8+ hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses Internet forums or discussion boards</td>
<td>☐ 1 hrs. ☐ 2 hrs. ☐ 3 hrs. ☐ 4 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 5 hrs. ☐ 6 hrs. ☐ 7 hrs. ☐ 8+ hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participates in networked gaming</td>
<td>☐ 1 hrs. ☐ 2 hrs. ☐ 3 hrs. ☐ 4 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 5 hrs. ☐ 6 hrs. ☐ 7 hrs. ☐ 8+ hrs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My child uses the following electronic devices: (Please check all devices that apply and indicate the hours per day for each device checked.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Device</th>
<th>Number of Hours per Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Desktop Computer connected to the Internet by WIFI or cable</td>
<td>☐ 1 hrs. ☐ 2 hrs. ☐ 3 hrs. ☐ 4 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 5 hrs. ☐ 6 hrs. ☐ 7 hrs. ☐ 8+ hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Laptop Computer connected to the Internet by WIFI or cable</td>
<td>☐ 1 hrs. ☐ 2 hrs. ☐ 3 hrs. ☐ 4 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 5 hrs. ☐ 6 hrs. ☐ 7 hrs. ☐ 8+ hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Tablet Computer w/ WIFI (e.g., iPad, Galaxy Tab)</td>
<td>☐ 1 hrs. ☐ 2 hrs. ☐ 3 hrs. ☐ 4 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 5 hrs. ☐ 6 hrs. ☐ 7 hrs. ☐ 8+ hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Media/MP3 device w/ WIFI (e.g., iPod Touch, Microsoft Zune)</td>
<td>☐ 1 hrs. ☐ 2 hrs. ☐ 3 hrs. ☐ 4 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 5 hrs. ☐ 6 hrs. ☐ 7 hrs. ☐ 8+ hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Smartphone (e.g., iPhone, Droid Phone, Blackberry, Windows Phone)</td>
<td>☐ 1 hrs. ☐ 2 hrs. ☐ 3 hrs. ☐ 4 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ 5 hrs. ☐ 6 hrs. ☐ 7 hrs. ☐ 8+ hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Type of Cellphone (i.e., flip phone)</td>
<td>1 hr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Console w/ Internet access (e.g., Microsoft Xbox 360, Nintendo Wii, Sony Playstation)</td>
<td>1 hr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portable Game Console w/ Internet Access (e.g., Nintendo 3DS/DSi, PlayStation Portable or Vita)</td>
<td>1 hr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Reader w/ WIFI access (e.g., Amazon Kindle, Barnes &amp; Noble Nook, Sony E-Book, etc.)</td>
<td>1 hr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech-Generating Assistive Technology (e.g., Proloquo2go on Ipad/iPod, Dynavox, etc.)</td>
<td>1 hr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Device:</td>
<td>1 hr.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I teach my child rules of thumb for the safe use of these electronic devices:
☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please share more details about rules of thumb you teach:
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

I monitor or regularly ask about my child’s use of these electronic devices:
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, please share more details about how you monitor or ask about usage:

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

If the previous question has an answer of Yes, how frequently do you check in on your child’s activities using these electronic devices?:

☐ Very Often ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

I enable parental controls on my child’s electronic devices: ☐ Yes ☐ No

If the last question has an answer of yes, these parental controls restrict which of the following?: (Please check all that apply.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>☐ Email use</th>
<th>☐ Text-messaging use</th>
<th>☐ Website use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Installation of new apps or software programs</td>
<td>☐ Media site use (e.g., YouTube)</td>
<td>☐ Social networking use (e.g., Facebook, Google+, Twitter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Networked gaming</td>
<td>☐ Instant messaging (via Yahoo, Google, AOL, etc.)</td>
<td>☐ Music sharing apps (e.g., iTunes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III. My Child’s Bullying Experiences

Peers (not including siblings) bully my child in face-to-face situations (select one):

☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Yearly ☐ Irregularly ☐ Never
Peer bullying of my child includes (select all that apply):

- □ Physical Bullying (e.g., kicking, hitting, punching, pushing, stealing, etc.)
- □ Verbal Bullying (e.g., insulting, threatening, name calling, etc.)
- □ Emotional Bullying (e.g., spreading of rumors, lies, or gossip about my child)
- □ Emotional Bullying (e.g., groups or gangs daring my child to engage in actions or risky behavior that my child would not usually do)

I would like to share these details about my child’s experiences with bullying by peers in face-to-face situations:

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In general, when peers bullied my child in face-to-face situations, my child reported this bullying to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority Figure</th>
<th>Frequency of Reporting Bullying</th>
<th>Way of Reporting Bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Me or Another Parent</td>
<td>□ Very Often</td>
<td>□ In Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Often</td>
<td>□ Over Email/Text/IM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Sometimes</td>
<td>□ Over the Phone</td>
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<td></td>
<td>□ Rarely</td>
<td>□ Other (fill in below)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Never</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
To what extent has my child learned effective strategies to address face-to-face bullying by peers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has not learned effective strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has learned effective strategies</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

What strategies did my child use to deal with bullying? Please share specific details:

_________________________________________________________________________________________________
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_________________________________________________________________________________________________
III. Cyberbullying Experiences

Peers (not including siblings) cyberbully my child (select one):

☐ Daily  ☐ Weekly  ☐ Monthly  ☐ Yearly  ☐ Irregularly  ☐ Never

Peers cyberbully my child using: (Select all that apply.)

☐ Text Messages  ☐ Instant Messages
☐ Emails  ☐ Social Networking Sites (e.g. Facebook, Google+)
☐ Chats  ☐ Blogs
☐ Web Forums  ☐ Webcams
☐ Other way (list any):  ☐ Networked Gaming

I would like to share these details about my child's experiences with cyberbullying by peers in online activities:

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In general, when peers cyberbullied my child in online activities, my child reported this cyberbullying to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority Figure</th>
<th>Frequency of Reporting Cyberbullying</th>
<th>Way of Reporting Cyberbullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Me or Another Parent</td>
<td>☐ Very Often</td>
<td>☐ In Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Often</td>
<td>☐ Over Email/Text/IM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Sometimes</td>
<td>☐ Over the Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Rarely</td>
<td>☐ Other (fill in below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ A Friend</td>
<td>☐ Very Often</td>
<td>☐ In Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Often</td>
<td>☐ Over Email/Text/IM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Sometimes</td>
<td>☐ Over the Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Rarely</td>
<td>☐ Other (fill in below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ A Sibling</td>
<td>☐ Very Often</td>
<td>☐ In Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Often</td>
<td>☐ Over Email/Text/IM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Sometimes</td>
<td>☐ Over the Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Rarely</td>
<td>☐ Other (fill in below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ A Teacher or School Official</td>
<td>☐ Very Often</td>
<td>☐ In Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Often</td>
<td>☐ Over Email/Text/IM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Sometimes</td>
<td>☐ Over the Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Rarely</td>
<td>☐ Other (fill in below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Other Person (fill in below):</td>
<td>☐ Very Often</td>
<td>☐ In Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Do not identify this person by name.]</td>
<td>☐ Often</td>
<td>☐ Over Email/Text/IM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Sometimes</td>
<td>☐ Over the Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Rarely</td>
<td>☐ Other (fill in below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To what extent has my child learned effective strategies to address cyberbullying in online activities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has not learned effective strategies</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Has learned effective strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What strategies did my child use to deal with cyberbullying? Please share specific details:

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For questions concerning this survey contact: Scott Michael Robertson  
{srobertson@ist.psu.edu} | (973) 464-6315
Appendix F. Survey with Participants
Face-to-Face Bullying of Youth Severity Scale

I have experienced these types of bullying in face-to-face situations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Face-to-Face Bullying</th>
<th>Frequency of Face-to-Face Bullying</th>
<th>Severity of Face-to-Face Bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People attack me or steal my stuff. These attacks could involve actions like kicking, punching, pushing, hitting, and spitting.</td>
<td>☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Yearly ☐ Irregularly ☐ Never</td>
<td>☐ Extremely Severe ☐ Very Severe ☐ Severe ☐ Moderately Severe ☐ Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I report this to others: ☐ Very Often ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People call me hurtful names, insult me, or threaten me.</td>
<td>☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Yearly ☐ Irregularly ☐ Never</td>
<td>☐ Extremely Severe ☐ Very Severe ☐ Severe ☐ Moderately Severe ☐ Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I report this to others: ☐ Very Often ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People spread rumors about me, make gossip, or tell lies about me.</td>
<td>☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Yearly ☐ Irregularly ☐ Never</td>
<td>☐ Extremely Severe ☐ Very Severe ☐ Severe ☐ Moderately Severe ☐ Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I report this to others: ☐ Very Often ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A group or gang of people dares or coerces me to do things I would not otherwise do.</td>
<td>☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Yearly ☐ Irregularly ☐ Never</td>
<td>☐ Extremely Severe ☐ Very Severe ☐ Severe ☐ Moderately Severe ☐ Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I report this to others: ☐ Very Often ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Cyberbullying of Youth Severity Scale**

I have experienced these types of bullying in my online activities, including texting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Cyberbullying</th>
<th>Frequency of Cyberbullying</th>
<th>Severity of Cyberbullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I receive or find online written messages about me. These messages threaten me, insult me, or call me names.</td>
<td>☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Yearly ☐ Irregularly ☐ Never</td>
<td>☐ Extremely Severe ☐ Very Severe ☐ Severe ☐ Moderately Severe ☐ Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I report this to others: ☐ Very Often ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never</td>
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<tr>
<td>I receive or find online media (images, videos, animations, sound clips, etc.) about me. This media threatens me, insults me, or calls me names.</td>
<td>☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Yearly ☐ Irregularly ☐ Never</td>
<td>☐ Extremely Severe ☐ Very Severe ☐ Severe ☐ Moderately Severe ☐ Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I report this to others: ☐ Very Often ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other persons pretend to be someone else or lie about their identity. They do this to harm me or to advantage of me.</td>
<td>☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Yearly ☐ Irregularly ☐ Never</td>
<td>☐ Extremely Severe ☐ Very Severe ☐ Severe ☐ Moderately Severe ☐ Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I report this to others: ☐ Very Often ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>People intentionally send me viruses or malware. This harms my messages, files, or devices.</td>
<td>☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Yearly ☐ Irregularly ☐ Never</td>
<td>☐ Extremely Severe ☐ Very Severe ☐ Severe ☐ Moderately Severe ☐ Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I report this to others: ☐ Very Often ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>People make hurtful polls about me. They post these polls online or over email/texts.</td>
<td>☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Yearly ☐ Irregularly ☐ Never</td>
<td>☐ Extremely Severe ☐ Very Severe ☐ Severe ☐ Moderately Severe ☐ Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I reported this to others: ☐ Very Often ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G. IRB Approval Letter (Penn State)
Date: November 20, 2012

From: Jodi L. Mathieu, Research Compliance Specialist

To: Scott M. Robertson

Subject: Results of Review of Proposal - Expedited (IRB #40919) Approval

Expiration Date: November 19, 2013

“Online and Offline Bullying of Autistic Youth”

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your proposal for use of human participants in your research. By accepting this decision, you agree to obtain prior approval from the IRB for any changes to your study. Unanticipated participant events that are encountered during the conduct of this research must be reported in a timely fashion.

Participants must receive a copy of the approved informed consent form to keep for their records.

If signed consent is obtained, the principal investigator is expected to maintain the original signed consent forms along with the IRB research records for this research at least three (3) years after termination of IRB approval. For projects that involve protected health information (PHI) and are regulated by HIPAA, records are to be maintained for six (6) years. The principal investigator must determine and adhere to additional requirements established by the FDA and any outside sponsors.

If this study will extend beyond the above noted approval expiration date, the principal investigator must submit a completed Continuing Progress Report to the Office for Research Protections (ORP) to request renewed approval for this research.

On behalf of the IRB and the University, thank you for your efforts to conduct your research in compliance with the federal regulations that have been established for the protection of human participants.

Please Note: The ORP encourages you to subscribe to the ORP listserv for protocol and research-related information. Send a blank email to: L-ORP-Research-L-subscribe-request@lists.psu.edu

JLM/jlm
cc: Shawn M. Clark
**Vita: Scott Michael Robertson**

Born in Pequannock, NJ, Scott grew up in Wayne, NJ. He completed his secondary schoolwork at Morristown-Beard School in Morristown, NJ. Graduating *Summa Cum Laude*, Scott received his bachelor’s of science degree in computer science from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He earned his master’s degree in human-computer interaction (HCI) from Carnegie Mellon University’s School of Computer Science. For his Ph.D. studies at the Pennsylvania State University (PSU), Scott studied information sciences and technology (IST). His dissertation research project investigated cyber- and face-to-face bullying of autistic youth.

During his graduate studies, Scott published four articles in journals and conference proceedings, and he co-authored a federally commissioned report. The College of IST at PSU awarded Scott their 2007 Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant of the Year Award and a Teaching Fellowship. PSU’s Department of Student Affairs awarded him their 2013 Jackson Lethbridge Award for leadership of initiatives to promote campus and community diversity. In 2011, Scott received a Google Lime Scholarship from Google Inc./Lime Connect. That year, the American Public Health Association (APHA) awarded him their Jay S. Drotman Memorial Award for emerging public health leaders. APHA’s Disability Section and the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) also awarded him their graduate student achievement awards.

Scott co-founded the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) as a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization led by autistic people in 2006. Serving in several leadership roles from 2006 to 2014, he helped establish ASAN’s initiatives in educational outreach, technical assistance and training, and community-based research. In 2012, Kathleen Sebelius, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, appointed Scott as a Public Member of the U.S. Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC). He collaborated with other IACC members to coordinate and monitor all federal activities for autism, including research, training, and resource development. Scott also collaborated on the development of strategic plans that prioritized goals and objectives for a combined $460 million in federal funding for autism.

Scott led initiatives to improve supports and services for adults and youth with I/DD in Pennsylvania (PA). He served on a workgroup that helped create one of the state’s two service systems for autistic adults. Serving on the Advisory Board of the Bureau of Autism Services, the state’s autism agency, Scott advised the implementation of PA’s *Autism Task Force Report*. He also served on the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council and a state workgroup to strengthen disability service systems. Recognizing this work’s impact, Scott received a Community Leadership Award from Pennsylvania Advocacy and Resources for Autism and Intellectual Disabilities in 2013. That Year, the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation awarded Scott their Public Policy Fellowship for national leaders in I/DD policy and practice. He will learn about and help facilitate the development of Congressional legislation.