My name is [Redacted] and I am a [Redacted] at Arkansas State University of Jonesboro. I'm currently working towards a B.S. in [Redacted] and a B.A. in [Redacted]. My current grade point average is a [Redacted].

Dr. [Redacted] and I are planning a study titled, [Redacted]. In today's society, more and more adolescents rely on computers. Yes, it is good for research, but teenagers rely on it for much more than that. They rely on the Internet for companionship, communication, and community. The world of cyberspace is unlimited and while it provides vast advantages, it also presents many risks, which include exposure to cyber-bullying, the temptation to post personal information, and speaking to strangers through chats and blogs.

The study is interested in the perceptions of risk behaviors, particularly, when concerning cyber-bullying and posting of personal information on Internet social networking websites. The study will survey adolescents of Northeast Arkansas. The survey will ask questions about personal use of Internet social networking websites and questions related to Internet privacy. The survey will also measure perceptions of risk-taking behaviors. The participants will be supplied with examples of Internet behavior, some taken from websites and some fabricated by the researchers, and asked on a scale 1 – 5 if the examples are a high risk to a low risk.

Another goal of this study is to further a key theory in communication, Cultivation Theory. Cultivation Theory derived from the time when television was central in American society. One concept related to Cultivation Theory is the Mean World Syndrome, which argues that the violence shown on television leads people to believe that the world is a meaner place than it might be. This study seeks to measure if today's use of media might contribute to the development of a Mean Online World Syndrome.
The Internet was originally used for e-mail and listing important servers. It was mainly limited to the corporate and scientific world and it was not common for teenagers to go online. Now, the Internet has soared to a whole new dominion. The emergence of the Internet and wireless communication technologies might have created a digital divide in society (Norris, 2001).

Social networks, which are the maps of interconnection among socially related people, seem to play important roles when it comes to understanding group dynamics and social structure (Degene and Forse, 1999). Years ago, teenagers discussed things in person, now you have Facebook, Myspace, and e-mail. The social aspect of the Internet has increased so much that sometimes the only way an some individuals can be genuine is online. One major American survey, found that adolescents who lack good communication with their peers or parents offline are more likely to form close online relationships (Wolak et al., 2003). However, while the Internet is giving the adolescents a freedom to express their feelings and who they are, at points this can be dangerous. One in five adolescents had received a sexual solicitation or approach over the Internet in the last year, one in 17 had been threatened or harassed, and one in 33 received an aggressive sexual solicitation (Livingstone & Bober, 2004).

Another major online risk to adolescents is cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying can be defined as a person’s involvement in the “use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others”(Besley, 2008). There is evidence that cyber-bullying is an epidemic. In a survey conducted by Dilmaç 25.5% of college students sampled reported engaging in some form of cyber-bullying; while 55.3% reported being a victim of cyber-bullying at least once in their lives. There have been concerns with cyber bulling because it can affect the individual being bullied in
extreme ways and the consequences can be dire, as in with the case of a New Jersey college student who committed suicide after being a victim of cyber-bullying (Chen, 2010).

In the age of technology, privacy, identity theft, and sharing of personal information generated is a growing concern among the general public, but even with these concerns people are still providing sensitive information about their personal lives over the Internet. A survey conducted found that 90% of their sample signed up on Facebook using their real first and last name, hometown, birth date, sex, and they uploaded a picture of themselves; also about one third gave out contact information such as phone number and personal address to house, dorm or apartment (Debatin, 2009). These findings suggest that users of social networking sites either do not understand the risks of providing such personal information over the Internet, or they feel that the benefits outweigh the potential risks.

One goal of the current study is to measure perceptions of risky online behaviors such as cyber-bullying and posting of personal information on Internet social networking websites. This study is not designed to determine why the participants have these perceptions. The study population will include high school students of Northeast Arkansas, and their parents. The measurement tool will be a survey. The survey will ask questions about personal use of the Internet, social networking websites, and other online activities. The questions will focus on such concerns as if the participant has profiles on social networking sites, how many different profiles, hours spent daily on social networking sites, does the participant have their name, address, contact information, and if has posted personal pictures on their profiles. The survey will also address perceptions of risk-taking behaviors. The participants will be supplied with a definition of cyber-bullying and ask if they have participated in bullying or been a victim of cyber-bullying. The participants will be supplied with examples of Internet behavior, some taken from websites
and some fabricated by the researchers, and asked on a scale 1 – 5 if the examples are a high risk to a low risk.

This study also seeks to contribute to the field of Communication Studies in the area of Cultivation Theory (Gerber & Gross, 1976). Cultivation Theory developed at the time when media was more consolidated and central in American society. This consolidation helped create overarching symbolic environment, leading people to share similar understandings of the nature of society. The fragmenting of media due to cable television, Ipods, and the Internet has broken down this consolidation of the media. Also, Cultivation Theory sees audiences as passive receivers of messages. Today’s youth are much more active in their use of technology. These changes would seem to call into question the usefulness of Cultivation Theory.

In order to consider the usefulness of Cultivation Theory in today’s modern world of media, this study will use a concept associated with Cultivation Theory, the Mean World Syndrome. Cultivation Theory argues that violence related television leads people to believe the world is a meaner place than it actually is. Since families are not be sitting around a single television set together, it would seem that the Mean World Syndrome would no longer be so prevalent. However, my suspicions are that people still view the world as a mean place. Could it be that individual use of the Internet leads to perceptions of the world being a mean place, just like group viewing of television once did? In order to consider this, I will administer a survey that will measure people’s perception of the world in general and also perception of the online world. One index will derive from Gerbner’s Mean World Index and the other I will create the other index and call it the Mean Online World Index.
The student researcher will write the literature review, create the survey, collect the data, analyze and interpret the results, create the report of the results, and present results at a communication related conference. Data collecting will begin in the spring of 2011, while the adolescents are in school. The local principals of the area high schools will be contacted to gain access to the student population. Participation in the research project will be completely voluntary. Data analysis will immediately follow as soon as all data is collected. The student will devote a minimum of two hours each day during the school week for the spring and summer semesters of 2011.
References


http://cyberbullying.org/


**SURF BUDGET FORM**

- □ Applying for Spring only
- ■ Applying for Spring and Summer
- □ Applying for Spring and Fall
- □ Applying for Spring, Summer and Fall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURF Share of Student's Costs</th>
<th>$1,250.00</th>
<th>$1,250.00</th>
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<tr>
<td>Student Travel Costs from SURF cannot exceed $750.00</td>
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<tr>
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<td>$2,750.00</td>
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Funding from other sources:

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<tr>
<th>Total Other Funding</th>
<th>$1,250.00</th>
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Total costs: $4,000.00

Period of Support: 1/1/11 through 8/15/11 (Please note if student will graduate before the project ends).

**NOTICE:** The students' funds are non-taxable under the Internal Revenue Service's Regulations on the scholarships and fellowships.
SURF BUDGET JUSTIFICATION FORM

Student and mentor have determined that the following expenditures are needed to adequately fund the project:

Mentor Costs:

Enter amount in box below

Summer Salaries and Fringe Benefits (9 Month Faculty Only):
Salary - enter amount
Applicable Fringe - (insert institutional fringe rate) RATE: $ -
Total Salary and Fringe $ -

Materials and Supplies:
Item 1 describe:
Item 2 describe:
Item 3 describe:
Total Materials and Supplies (books, paper, etc.) $ -

Travel Costs:
Item 1 describe: Travel to National Communication Association Conference $ 750.00
Item 2 describe:
Item 3 describe:
Total Travel Costs $ 750.00

Other Expenses:
Item 1 describe:
Item 2 describe:
Item 3 describe:
Total Other Expenses (Printing, copying, etc.) $ -

Total Mentor Costs Cannot Exceed $750 $ 750.00

Student Costs:

Stipend: $ 2,500.00

Student Travel Costs (cannot exceed $ 750):
Item 1 describe: Travel to National Communication Association Conference
Item 2 describe:
Total Student Travel Costs $ 750.00

Total Student Costs $ 2,500.00

Total Project Costs Before Other Funding $ 3,250.00

Other funding describe:
$ -