Web Gangsters: Juveniles’ Expression of Aggression on Social Networking Sites

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ABSTRACT

Many researchers have attempted to determine whether media plays a role in the violent or aggressive behavior of youth. However, previous research fails to address the new trend of young people posting negative images, videos, or comments on the Internet, specifically on popular web sites such as YouTube (www.youtube.com), MySpace (www.myspace.com) and Facebook (www.facebook.com). This research attempts to determine if certain aspects of these sites (for instance, a more controlled impression management process that is not available in face-to-face interaction) lead youth to perceive themselves as more powerful or aggressive, and, further, if their online activity reflects their perception of this persona.

Adolescence is considered to be a critical period because, at this age, people attempt to discover the many possible aspects of their identity. Consequently, experimentation is apparent in the behavior of youth (Zhao 2005). Experimentation within the behavior of youth extends to all areas of their communication. Some examples might include the behavior they exhibit during face-to-face communication as well as through online communication.

The establishment of the Internet as a vital part of everyday life has created an outlet for youth in America to develop their identity. This source is sustained by four elements provided during non-face-to-face interaction: virtuality or virtual reality, spatiality (ambiguity of the boundaries of the online world) disembedding (separation from the user’s immediate location) and disembodiment (separation from the user’s offline identity) (Slater 2002). These elements enable Internet users to communicate without physical limitations such as a confined space or genuine identity (Slater 2002).

When researchers study the effects of the media on youth, they have typically focused on negative images that youth may be exposed to through various media, like television and the Internet; most of these studies have attempted to analyze the youths’ responses to possibly damaging stimuli (Savage and Yancey 2006). However, many instances are occurring where youth use the
Internet as means of posting images of aggressive behavior rather than being victims of negative images they observe online. As a result, with the rise of youth involving themselves in aggressive behavior while using the Internet, it would be beneficial to conduct a qualitative content analysis that examines how young people use the Internet, specifically their use of social networking sites, to observe their ability to conduct themselves aggressively.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to sociologist Charles Cooley (1902), individuals develop a sense of self through social interaction. This process, defined as the “looking glass self,” allows humans to make self-judgments based on the appraisals (verbal and non-verbal) of others. In other words, just as if looking at a reflection in the mirror, humans have the ability to interpret their behavior based on the reactions of others and to use the information as a basis for understanding their self-concept (Zhao 2005). Furthermore, the development of self gradually progresses as an individual reaches adulthood. George Herbert Mead (1934) theorized that during the initial stages of self-acquisition (the process of learning a sense of self) a child considers the appraisals of ‘significant others’ or individuals close to the child, like parents or teachers. As a child progresses to the second stage of self-acquisition, s/he begins to consider the appraisals of ‘generalized others,’ the larger community to which the individual belongs. Social interaction does not simply include receiving cues from others to develop self-conception, but it also encompasses an active component of self-presentation (Zhao 2005). Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) developed the dramaturgical theory, which holds that during daily interaction, individuals choose how they want to present themselves as if they are performing for an audience. The manner in which individuals choose to present themselves is influenced by whom they perceive to be their audience (Goffman 1959). Even though these theories relate to face-to-face communication, they can be applied to understanding the aggressive behavior of adolescents when they are communicating on social networking sites because, in many instances, the Internet has taken the place of face-to-face communication.

Online Social Interaction

The theories previously discussed regarding social interaction were developed by analyzing traditional, face-to-face communication. However, the emergence of computer mediated communication (CMC) requires additional evaluation of these theories. Due to the lack of a corporeal copresence or physical copresence of the communicating individuals, CMC creates and dedacts elements normally present during interaction. For example, the Internet allows users to interact through a ‘telecopresence’ or interaction
with individuals that are not physically present but electronically connected (Zhao 2005). This aspect of communication has established four main properties for CMC: virtuality, spatiality, disembedding and disembodiment (Slater 2002). The term virtuality suggests that the Internet can be considered more than simply a medium, but rather an actual “place” where individuals can become immersed into the perception of corporeal copresence with other users during interactive, textual communication (Slater 2002). Spatiality is another property presented because the social atmosphere in online communication within ‘cyberspace’ only exists within that specific software or network. In other words, cyberspace is spatially ambiguous, not directly linking to the offline world, but it can be connected or linked within the complex, changing network (Slater 2002). Since the Internet is not confined by the limits of space, users are allowed to communicate with individuals who are spatially disconnected, which enables users to be disembedded from their present location, experiencing a sense of copresence with other users located elsewhere in the world (Slater 2002). Furthermore, through the process of disembedding, communities created by users that are entirely online can be adequately sustained.

The primary outcome of online communication caused by the lack of a face-to-face connection is disembodiment, the ability for users to detach their online identity from their physical body (Slater 2002). Individuals are separated from their physical being while engaged in online communication because the telecopresence or perception of being in the same location establishes two properties: anonymity and texuality (Slater 2002). For instance, while communicating with previously unknown individuals in the offline world, users have the option of not disclosing their true identity and remaining anonymous to others. In addition, online communication relies heavily on text as the primary medium for communication (Slater 2002). Zhao (2005) describes disembodied communication as narrative in nature, meaning that users are charged with the task of self-description in meeting other users, whether it takes the form of their online screen name or the self-posted information on their online profiles. Consequently, users are only known by their autobiographical portrayals, and they can present themselves in a manner contrary to reality without the information being verified or contradicted (Slater 2002).

The theory of the looking glass self taken from traditional perspectives proposes that individuals learn a sense of self by responding to others’ responses during interactions with significant others (parents, family, school) and, as they mature, generalized others (society, cultural groups, etc). Since CMC possesses the property of disembodiment resulting in interaction being primarily textual, how are Internet users able to observe
the reactions of others and use these reactions to develop self-concept? Zhao (2005) differentiates between the “self” that is developed during face-to-face interaction and the self that is developed in the Internet world, naming the latter the “digital self.” The digital self is created solely through online interaction without influences from non-verbal cues and traditional interruptions from the environment. In addition, the digital self is believed to be inwardly oriented (directed toward inward thoughts and feelings) that are narrative in nature and relying on users to use strictly linguistic communication to describe themselves to other users. This form of communication is retractable and is separate from their offline identities and includes the possibility of being multiplied via interaction with individuals in different societies (Zhao 2005). The ability individuals have to develop a “digital self” without a corporal copresence shows that non-verbal cues are not necessary for the development of this form of self-concept. Instead, the self is developed primarily from the perception of what others think. However, by basing self-formation on perceptions without reinforcement from other cues (e.g. nonverbal), discrepancies like misinterpretation of others perceptions have the opportunity to become more prevalent, even though the strength of the connections between self-concept and perceptions of the views of others remain the same. In other words, the self-view derived from the digital self has the potential to be contradictory to the offline persona.

Another component of the Internet, called disembedding, also creates an additional element that alters the process of the looking glass self. When individuals begin to encompass the options of generalized others into the traditional development of their self-perception, the generalized others only include those within that specific community. However, while online, users communicate with others outside their immediate geographical domain. As a result, users are subject to taking into consideration the perspectives of a broader range of individuals. Lastly, the online world subjects people to be viewed by an “e-audience,” or other users within the Internet (Zhao 2005). According to the dramaturgical theory (Goffman 1959), individuals adjust their behaviors regarding how to present themselves based on who they perceive their audience to be. In the online world, the process of impression management can prove to be a lot easier because individuals can choose what information they want to present to others without interruptions from the spontaneous reactions of others. Since CMC lacks components of typical social communication, why do users continue to utilize the Internet? A created social life on Internet sites provides an environment that is liberated of normal restrictions, for instance the real offline identities of those who utilize these web sites (Slater 2002).
Social Networking Sites

The Internet provides a variety of media that users can utilize to communicate with one another, such as email or instant messaging. Of particular popularity within the Internet are Social Networking Sites (SNS). SNS are described as sites that allow users to create profiles within the boundaries of the site and, using their profile, they can then access a list of other users with whom they have a connection, and then view a list of connections that other users have made on the site (Boyd and Ellison 2007). The first identifiable social networking site (SNS) was launched in 1997; however, SNS did not become popular with a large number of Internet users until after the creation of Friendster (www.friendster.com) in 2002. By 2003, newly formed SNS were constantly being established by site creators who were looking to take advantage of the growing popularity of the Internet (Boyd 2008). Among this string of incoming SNS, the most famous of its time was the Internet site entitled MySpace. MySpace possessed many aspects that differentiated it from other SNS but the most prominent aspect was the fact that MySpace’s policy allowed minors to join and create profiles. By 2004, teens were joining MySpace in large numbers (Boyd and Ellison 2007).

According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 93 percent of American adolescents ranging in age from 12 to 17 use the Internet and 73 percent of these users have established profiles on SNS (Lenhert, Purcell, Smith and Zickuhr 2010). What aspects of MySpace (or any other social networking mediums) lure such a large number of adolescents to join the site? During adolescence, teens are socially adventurous and tend to make large developments in the search for the self or identity; however, they are restricted by factors like mobility or their age (Zhao 2005). SNS provide a place for teens to develop identity and status, make sense of cultural cues and negotiate public life (Boyd 2008). For instance, SNS allow teens to be disembodied from their geographic location, thus providing the ability to ‘see’ the world from the comfort of their home (Zhao 2005). Also, as a result of experiencing difficulties in their development, teens search for a confidant with whom they can share their feelings. Furthermore, disembodiment and anonymity attracts adolescents because the lack of face-to-face interaction results in the process of impression management that allows individuals to choose what information they present to others (Zhao 2005). The ongoing process of impression management is key to developing social identity and SNS allow more opportunities for this process to occur (Zhao 2005).

Today, web sites such as Facebook and YouTube are at the forefront of social networking web sites. Facebook was originally created in 2004 as a SNS for students attending Harvard University and eventually began supporting other colleges and universities and in 2005 it reached other users, including
adolescents (Boyd and Ellison 2007). Another popular site, YouTube, has become a successful online destination with more than 100 million views daily (Cheng, Dale and Liu 2008). Before YouTube was established in 2005, many other video sharing web sites had been in existence for a period of time; however, using the video sharing sites proved difficult because of the lack of a straightforward, integrated web site (Cheng, Dale and Liu 2008). YouTube separates itself from other video sharing sites because it has a social networking aspect, allowing users to not only upload videos but also to create profiles and link with other users. In addition, YouTube possesses another aspect not previously used on other video sharing sites by relying on user-generated content and linking related videos that were posted on the site (Cheng, Dale and Liu 2008).

Youth and Aggressive Behavior
Elements such as virtuality, spatiality, disembedding and disembodiment within the Internet provide a platform favorable for interaction amongst peers and allow youth to portray themselves in any manner they desire. In an environment that allows the demonstration of a broad range of behaviors, what motivates youth to display themselves aggressively? Within the social networks of adolescents, aggression is essential to status amongst peers (Faris and Felmlee 2011). In addition, the relationship between violence and peer status is constant regardless of race or gender (Kreager 2007). The amount of aggression exhibited in the behavior of youth increases until their peer status reaches the peak of the social pyramid (Faris and Felmlee 2011). Preoccupations concerning peer status within adolescents drive aggression because youth aspire to gain and maintain a high social status amongst their peers (Faris and Felmlee 2011; Kreager 2007). Even though this behavior has yet to be proven as an adequate avenue for gaining social status, youth believe aggression will lead to the achievement of status amongst peers and their behavior reflects this belief (Faris and Felmlee 2011). In order to answer the research question, the researcher will use the definition of “aggressive behavior” as defined by Savage and Yancey (2006): negative actions that are not necessarily illegal because it does not include the action of physical force to others.

Traditionally, when researchers reviewed relationships between aggression and media, they viewed it from the perspective of youth observing negative media and displaying an altered behavior as a result of influential information (Savage and Yancey 2006). However, intensive research has yet to be conducted on youth who use the Internet as means of posting or engaging in negative behavior. In recent years, there have been multiple accounts of adolescents using SNS to create aggressive posts. In a USA Today article, the author coined the phrase “web bangers” as individuals who use the Internet,
specifically SNS, to post gang-related pictures, signs and video. For example, a teen from Chicago who was believed to be involved in vandalism to a church was arrested using evidence obtained from pictures he posted to his online profile (Glazer 2006).

Boasting of negative behavior on SNS is not limited to individuals who have violated criminal codes. In a well-known video circulating on the Internet, an uncle disciplines his nephew for his gang-related posts on Facebook. While being disciplined by his uncle, the teen admitted that he was not involved in gang activity, even though the post on his profile suggested otherwise (Shieh 2011).

HYPOTHESIS
According to the scholarly literature, the lack of face-to-face interaction during computer-based interaction allows Internet users the ability to present themselves in a manner contrary to their true identity (Slater 2002; Boyd 2008). This element provides an easier platform for the process of impression management because the impression presented cannot be contradicted by physical interaction. Adolescents in search of social interaction and social status will be drawn to SNS due to their advantageous characteristics for real-time communication and anonymity. As a result, the researcher argues that, among those tested, adolescents will feel socially at ease while using the Internet, resulting in a feeling of comfort by demonstrating an aggressive persona on SNS.

METHODOLOGY
For the purpose of examining demonstrations of aggression among adolescent Internet users on various social networking sites (YouTube, MySpace, and Facebook) the method of qualitative content analysis employed will be deductive or direct analysis. The content of adolescent profiles, such as profile name, image/video posts and conversations with other users will be analyzed for signs of aggressive behavior.

Qualitative Content Analysis
Qualitative content analysis is a research method that allows the reflexive analysis of written, verbal and visual communication through systematic collection, organization and interpretation of the phenomena observed (Elo and Kyngäs 2007; Malterud 2001). In addition, the use of content analysis enables researchers to make empirical generalizations based on information collected from the content of the information examined that can eventually
be applicable within the area or discipline studied (Elo and Kyngäs 2007; Malterud 2001). In the present study, the sampling of subjects (profiles of adolescents on SNS) will be conducted through judgment sampling, also known as purposeful sampling (Marshall 1996). Judgment sampling enables the researcher to actively choose the sample of subjects that will adequately answer the intended research question (Marshall 1996). The framework that will be used to determine candidate subjects (adolescent Internet users 18 years of age and younger) in the sample will be the presence of offensive or aggressive material on their profile, such as profanity and gang related material. For instance, within YouTube, key works such as, “teen fight,” “gang,” “blood” or “crip” will be used to determine sample subjects. The aspect of “linking” other profile users on SNS through “friend lists” will be utilized to find additional subjects for study (snowball sampling) and provide an additional method of sampling. This method of judgment sampling is necessary because SNS are too large to be reviewed in their entirety and will allow the researcher to view specific example of aggressive behavior on SNS (Elo and Kyngäs 2007). In addition, the information analyzed will consist of the profile name, image/video posts and communications with other users. Lastly, the unit of analysis will be each individual profile viewed.

In order to conduct the analytic process of content analysis, the researcher must determine whether inductive or deductive reasoning will be considered (Elo and Kyngäs 2007). Deductive content analysis allows the researcher to test concepts or hypotheses as well as further describe or identify concepts that have previously been theorized (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Elo and Kyngäs 2007). According to the literature review, previous research has been conducted on online social interaction; however, there is a dearth of information concerning the relationship between online social interaction and the impact on aggressive behavior in adolescents. Consequently, deductive content analysis will allow the researcher to draw empirical generalizations about phenomenon. A structured matrix of analysis (Table 1) was used to organize the data and answer the question of how adolescents demonstrate aggressive behavior on their online profiles (Elo and Kyngäs 2007).

Table 1. Structured matrix template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile Name</th>
<th>Profile Post (image/video)</th>
<th>Conversation/Comments</th>
<th>Other Relevant Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


ANALYSIS

After reviewing numerous profiles within the digital confines of YouTube, MySpace and Facebook, 19 subjects were selected via a process of judgment sampling based on possible contributions to answering the research question, and expressions of aggression among youth who use SNS. Table 2 is a structured matrix that organizes relevant content observed on the selected profiles into the following categories: profile name, profile post (image/video), conversation/comments and other relevant observations. In addition, with respect to the category “Conversation/Comments,” “Conversation” refers to words spoken within the recorded video and “Comments” refer to posts created within the comment area of the SNS by the user examined or other profile users.

Table 2. Descriptions of expression of aggression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile Name</th>
<th>Profile Post (image/video)</th>
<th>Conversation/Comments</th>
<th>Other Relevant Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bigbeezy24</td>
<td>Video: Fight in Sunrise</td>
<td>Comment (by user): City referred to as “gunrise”</td>
<td>Other posts uploaded by user were of recorded fights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshazimiz23</td>
<td>Video: Blood Walking</td>
<td>Comment: “Pretending to be a Blood”</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yugiohoe21</td>
<td>Video: Argument between teen girls</td>
<td>Conversation: Girls use excess of profanity</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mzbinabadd1</td>
<td>Video: Teens claiming gangs</td>
<td>Conversation: Refer to themselves as “bad ass”</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deezieb17</td>
<td>Video: Teen throwing up gang signs</td>
<td>Comment: “Internet Gangster”</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toledo419glasscity</td>
<td>Video: Teens claiming gangs</td>
<td>Conversation: “S*** its me what you trynna do”</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MiamiLesbian</td>
<td>Video: Teen claiming to be Blood</td>
<td>Conversation: Teen requests messages and comments</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ctallion08</td>
<td>Video: Teen displaying gang signs</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YungGoon</td>
<td>Image: Gang paraphenalia</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Video posts are of people dancing (non-gang related)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2slobkilla</td>
<td>Video: Teen displaying gang signs</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dustie123456</td>
<td>Video: Teen displaying gang signs</td>
<td>Comment (by user): “me staccin my set”</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pele818</td>
<td>Video: Teen displaying gang signs</td>
<td>Comment: “eThug”</td>
<td>Teen posts videos with paraphenalia related to rival gangs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngbrin232</td>
<td>Image: Teen displaying gang signs</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blukb</td>
<td>Video: Teen fighting</td>
<td>Conversation: “It’s already recording” (then fight breaks out)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile Name</td>
<td>Profile Post (image/video)</td>
<td>Conversation/Comments</td>
<td>Other Relevant Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3Y can’t STOP ME FROM BANGING DAT W.S.P. on 218st</td>
<td>Image: Teen displaying gang signs</td>
<td>Comment (by user): “CKarson 218st West Side Piru”</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jmoney</td>
<td>Image: Teen displaying gang signs</td>
<td>Comment: User refers to inconsistencies on the profile</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me. Breezyf.Baby</td>
<td>Image: Teen displaying gang signs</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal 4 Fanga Gang</td>
<td>Image: Gang paraphenalia</td>
<td>Comment (by user): “Sexy Criminal”</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Boss Flicc</td>
<td>Image: Holding a large amount of money</td>
<td>Comment (by user): “I’m a Beast”</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the profiles shown in by Table 2, the researcher observed examples of the user’s choice of their profile name being utilized to convey a dominant or tough persona. For instance, the users Criminal 4 Fanga Gang and 2slobkilla are examples that explicitly self-identify in a derogatory manner, such as a criminal or killer. Other observed users chose more subtle methods of conveying a dominant persona. For example, YoungGoon uses the slang jargon ‘Goon,’ commonly used to refer to criminals. Also, the researcher believes that the user mizbinabadd1is intended to convey to the Internet audience the extent of his/her “bad” or negative behavior. Although the other variables (profile posts and comments/conversations) listed in the matrix demonstrated behavior consistent with aggression, five dominant trends were consistent among the variables analyzed: vulgarity of language, similarity of video post genres, inconsistency or contradictions among posts, premeditation of behavior, and degrading comments from other users. Elements of the majority of these trends were exemplified by the user mizbinabadd1. All videos posted by this particular user portrayed a group of teens in front of an unknown school making violent boasts, claiming membership in various gangs or other territories, which is behavior exhibited in many other video posts. In addition, throughout the entirety of both videos, the youth use a large amount of profanity or vulgar language. For instance, the teens in the video used phrases like, “I’m a hood b****” and “I fight like a n*****,” Premeditation or pre-planning of aggressive behavior was demonstrated within their conversation (YouTube). A prime example of this element occurred when one of the teens stated, “Gotta get down,” prompting the teens to initiate a fight amongst each other. However, even though these users attempted to portray themselves as ‘hard,’ the portrayed persona was not consistently believed by peer users to be genuine personality. The researcher noticed trends of disbelief on the part of other users through the use of degrading comments on the observed posts. For instance, on
the video posted by mzbinabadd1, another user commented, “yall aint bad come to my hood and I’ll show you bad.” Also, in a video posted by the user pele818, the user and others portray themselves using gang signs affiliated with the well-known Crip gang. Users who commented on the video referred to pele818 as an “eThug” (Internet thug). The researcher believes that comments of this nature may also be contributed by self-fulfilling attempts by peer users to downgrade the observed user’s deviance, thus portraying themselves as tougher. 

Lastly, the most dominant trend among examined posts and profiles were inconsistencies and contradictions within the information posted. For instance, on the profile of the user Jmoney, the user is portrayed in the profile picture wearing red and holding up a gang sign affiliated with the well-known Blood gang. However the user’s profile background design is affiliated with the Blood’s rival gang, the Crips. Another relevant inconsistency is seen on the profile of Pele818. This user provides two similar videos, however, one consists of the user wearing paraphernalia and using signs affiliated with the Blood gang, while in the other video he uses signs from the Crip gang, a rival of the Bloods. The researcher believes that these inconsistencies strongly demonstrate young people’s persistent attempts to be portrayed as having a tough persona. In other words, the youth were so consumed with attempting to portray themselves aggressively that, at times, they contradicted themselves.

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of the present research study was to evaluate adolescents’ use of social networking sites and their ability to conduct themselves aggressively during computer-based communication. According to the review of the scholarly literature the main elements presented in online or computer based communications are virtuality, spatiality, disembedding and disembodiment. For the purpose of discussion, the researcher will primarily discuss the results from observations of adolescents online as they relate to disembedding and disembodiment. According to sociologist Charles Cooley, during traditional face-to-face interaction individuals learn self-concept as if they are observing themselves in a mirror (Zhao 2005). This theory, known as the looking glass self, was built upon by George Herbert Mead who theorized that young children acquire “self” by considering appraisals of ‘significant others,’ and eventually, consider appraisals from ‘generalized others.’ During the traditional process of self-acquisition, ‘generalized others’ is usually extended only to other individuals within the immediate community (Zhao 2005). However, through disembedding, online individuals are not bound to the confines of their present location. This allows for the expansion of those
considered to be ‘generalized others’. This researcher believes that the factor of disembedding plays a major role in the behavior of youth online. During the age of adolescence, most young people strive to present themselves in a manner they believe will cause them to be more socially attractive (Boyd 2008). The online world, specifically within social networking sites, creates an environment that exposes youth to an even larger number of peers. This factor was evident in a profile observed wherein the user was portrayed in the video posing as a member of the blood gang while requesting that other users to either comment on the profile or add the profile as a network friend. Furthermore, the researcher believes that the exaggerated attempts of these youth to be accepted by their numerous online peers were evident in their contradictory behavior. For instance, many of the youth posted pictures or videos to their profile that were aggressive, and contained elements of various gang influences. These youth made various exaggerated attempts to portray themselves as having an aggressive persona that they failed to realize contradictions in their behavior.

Although disembodiment within the online world is a primary factor contributing to the majority of behavioral trends online, the adolescents’ exaggerated behaviors interfered with the anonymity of their true personas, especially when the youth posted contradictory material. Disembodiment refers to the ability of Internet users to detach their physical identity from their online identity, allowing online communication to be completely anonymous and textual (Slater 2002). The researcher believes that this element contributes to the tendency of adolescents to portray themselves aggressively online because, while using a SNS, they can embody any identity they choose. However, the researcher observed that even though the online interaction was anonymous and textual, many of the adolescents’ aggressive interactions were not believed or taken seriously by other online users.

CONCLUSION

In order to answer the research question, the researcher relied on judgment sampling while viewing profiles of various adolescents. This method adequately provided examples of aggression and allowed the researcher to draw conclusions based on knowledge from previous research within the discipline. However, the researcher was unable to define reasons for demonstrations of behavior from first hand depictions of adolescents. More extensive research inclusive of qualitative data based on interviews with youth who have considered or have practiced portraying themselves aggressively on SNS would reveal valuable information about the nature of online communications through SNS and how it may contribute to aggressive ideation. In addition, targeting the social factors these youth believe
contributed to their behaviors would aid in addressing the issue at the society level. In addition, the researcher would like to question youth as to whether their aggressive behavior has lead them to consider behaving aggressively or even violent in the offline world, as violent implications are beyond the scope of this article. This research could inform practice and policy within the educational, social work, and juvenile justice systems.
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