The Nature of Cyber Bullying Behaviours

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INTRODUCTION

The continued and rapidly increasing digitalisation of society perpetuates our reliance on technology. There are many benefits associated with our increasing access to, and use of, digital technology and online resources. For example, technology and online resources can be used to: Develop and maintain social connectedness (e.g., Chayko, 2014), promote social responsibility (e.g., Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown., 2009), enhance wellbeing (e.g., Hill, Betts, & Gardner, 2015) and innovation (e.g., Oldham & Da Silva, 2015), prevent cognitive decline (e.g., Slegers, van Boxtel, & Jolles, 2012), facilitate knowledge acquisition (e.g., Thorpe et al., 2015) and knowledge transfer (e.g., Erickson & Johnson, 2011), and complete day-to-day activities such as monitoring health behaviours (e.g., Banchs, & Scher, 2015). However, this increasing access to, and reliance on, technology is not without risks. One such risk is that technology can be used as a mechanism to engage in antisocial behaviour directed towards specific others. For example, through threatening emails and images, and spreading rumours technology can be used to intimidate and victimize others (Dehue, 2013).

Cyber bullying represents a specific form of aggressive behaviour directed towards an individual that takes place using digital means (Law, Shapka, Hymel, Olson, & Waterhouse, 2012). Cyber victimisation can be considered as the experiences of being the target of bullying behaviours. The current chapter will begin by exploring what acts constitute cyber bullying and the various forms that cyber bullying behaviour can take. The chapter will also explore why individuals engage in such behaviour. Finally, the chapter will make some recommendations that should be considered by researchers examining cyber bullying.

BACKGROUND

Interest in understanding victimisation experiences and bullying behaviours was initially prompted by Olweus' work in the 1970s and subsequently by the wealth of research evidence that has reported longitudinal relationships between experiences of bullying and wellbeing and adjustment (e.g., Fergusson, Boden, & Horwood, 2014; Ttofi, Bowes, Farrington, & Lösel, 2014; Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013). Together, these studies have suggested that negative consequences may occur for those individuals who engage in bullying behaviour and those who experience victimisation.

Cyber bullying involves individuals using technology as a medium to bully others (Smith, 2009) and has been defined as "the use of the Internet or other digital communication devices to insult or threaten someone" (Juvonen & Gross, 2008, p. 498). Following a recent review and meta-analysis of existing cyber bullying literature, cyber bullying was defined as: "(a) intentional aggressive behaviour that is (b) carried out repeatedly, (c) occurs between a perpetrator and victim who are unequal in power, and (d) occurs through electronic technologies" (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014, p. 37). Understanding young people experiences of cyber bullying is important because it has been regarded as an "emerging international public health concern" (Nixon, 2014, p154).

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FORMS OF CYBER BULLYING

Cyber bullying can occur in many forms and the variation, to some extent, represents the evolving nature of technology. Consequently, there is often little agreement among researchers, practitioners, and young people as to what constitutes cyber bullying. Some researchers, such as Mason (2008), have suggested that cyber bullying comprises both written and verbal acts which can be aligned to the more traditional face-to-face forms of bullying. Conversely, other researchers such as Tokunaga (2010) suggested that cyber bullying includes elements of aggressive, hostile, and harmful acts that are carried out through an electronic device. However, whilst different conceptualisations of cyber bullying have been proposed, when assessing cyber bullying behaviours and cyber victimisation experiences it is important to consider: (a) what technology individuals actually use and (b) how individuals use the technology. Therefore, it is likely that as new technologies emerge and current technologies evolve, new forms of cyber bullying will also continue to emerge and evolve (Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013).

Parallels have also been drawn between cyber bullying and the various forms of face-to-face bullying. Mark and Ratliffe (2011) argued that cyber bullying is a form of relational bullying that uses technology, rather than face-to-face methods, as the medium to bully others. For example, technology can be used to victimise by calling others names, making threats, spreading rumours, disclosing another individual's private information, and purposefully socially isolating or excluding individuals. Similarly, Wang, Iannotti, and Luk (2012) argued that parallels could be drawn between face-to-face relational bullying and cyber bullying as both forms of bullying involve verbal bullying, social exclusion, and spreading rumours but not physical acts, although of course the medium through which these acts occur is different. However, whilst parallels have been drawn by some researchers between face-to-face bullying and cyber bulling it is clear that some young people regard them as distinct entities. In addition to young people's perception that cyber bullying is distinct from face-to-face bullying, further evidence of this distinction is provided by research that has reported that the different forms of bullying have distinct consequences (e.g., Kubiszewski, Fontaine, Potard, & Auzoult, 2015; Pieschl, Kuhlmann, & Prosch, 2015). Some young people also regard cyber bullying as a distinct form of bullying that is perceived to be more serious than face-to-face bullying (Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009). One potential explanation for why young people regard cyber bullying as more serious than face-to-face bullying is that whilst cyber bullying may occur because of something that happened at school (Cassidy et al., 2009), the accessibility of technology means that incidences of cyber bullying often extend beyond the school day. Consequently, compared to face-to-face forms of bullying, cyber bullying is regarded as more relentless in nature because the constant connectiveness of society means that it is harder for the target to avoid cyber bullying and, as such, the negative consequences are likely exacerbated (Davies, Randall, Ambrose, & Orand, 2014).

There is also little agreement amongst researchers as to whether cyber bullying represents an indirect or direct form of bullying. For example, Huang and Chou (2010) argue that because of the range and scope of technology available cyber bullying can be regarded as an indirect form of bullying. Conversely, Vandebosch and van Cleemput (2009) argue that cyber bullying comprises both direct and indirect forms. The direct forms of cyber bullying include physical (e.g., purposely sending a virus infected file), verbal (e.g., using the internet or mobile phone to insult or threaten), non-verbal (e.g., sending threatening or obscene pictures or illustrations), and social (e.g., excluding someone from a group online) acts. The indirect forms of cyber bullying can involve disclosing entrusted or private information (e.g., through an email), masquerading (e.g., deceiving someone by impersonating someone else), spreading gossip (e.g., using a mobile phone, email, or chat